LADY CITIZEN: GENDER, MEMORY, AND CIVIC IDENTITY

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation theorizes the first lady as a distinct embodiment of gender and citizenship. In particular, I argue that by examining the intersection of the first lady role and citizenship, we gain a more complete portrait of role's historic, rhetorical, and *public* significance. Specifically, this study asks: How does the role of first lady offer a particular embodiment of citizenship in the public sphere? What are the constraints and opportunities of foregrounding the first lady as a public citizen? What are the rhetorical mechanisms that help explain how the informal role persists? Utilizing a rhetorical perspective, I begin with the premise that language, symbols, and discourse are never devoid of argument. My method, then, involves attention to the context, language, visuals, and performative acts through which the first lady role is constructed, maintained, and altered.

Through three case studies I trace how the first lady role is foregrounded as a public citizen. Specifically, I examine the projection of the role onto Michelle Obama during the 2008 press coverage of the presidential election, the rhetorical exigencies that compel Lady Bird Johnson's 1964 Whistle Stop tour, as well commemoration of the role at the Smithsonian exhibit and six presidential museums. Despite the abundance of possibility in theorizing about the public nature of the first lady role, what manifests throughout this project is a model of citizenship highly constrained, and overdetermined by not only gender, but also race and class. As such, the first lady's citizen-status is not common or accessible, but rather always circumstantial and subservient to traditions

based in white, heteronormative, male, supremacy. Indeed, the role's agency lies in its ability to reify the gendered, raced, and classed assumptions of our nation's liberal roots, not challenge them. Despite these findings, the project contributes to the growing body of literature that recovers, resuscitates, and redefines how women's narratives are being remembered, created, and appreciated. The *Lady Citizen* presents new obstacles to reviving the first lady's public legacy, but paves the way future work to come.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Robert Hinck, for the nonstop conversations and the *generally* perfect balance of criticism and encouragement. It is dedicated to my adviser, Kristan Poirot, official herder of the scholar cats, for not giving up on herding me. Additionally, it is dedicated to my parents, Bill and Mandy, because without them none of this would even be possible. Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my dogs, Larry and Louise, whose frequent puppy naps kept me jealous and motivated to finish.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The first lady has proved a fascinating point of inquiry. Communication scholars in particular, have traced the first lady's unique rhetorical history, charted her often challenging relationship with gender and feminism, and even examined her presence in editorial cartoons. Throughout this research, the first lady role continues to afford scholars with a seemingly unending paradox.[1] Perplexingly, the role is simultaneously a position of conventional femininity, but also of feminist advancement.[2] From the role's conception, the women who have served in it have been asked to evolve with society, shifting their individual performances to meet current expectations of the ideal woman. With national visibility and often "celebrity like" status the first lady serves as a symbol of U.S. womanhood.[3] Despite the fact that the role is often thought of as the extension of marriage, it is not confined to the personal, as first ladies have been some of the most politically active women in U.S. history, performing their duties in public contexts. Though we have traced the role to its historical commitment to traditional femininity, motherhood, and public duties, rhetorical scholars have yet to explicitly theorize how discourse about and by the first lady present the American public with a distinct embodiment of gendered citizenship.

Several scholars have developed useful frameworks for understanding the first lady role as a source of both power and constraint. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell has called the presidency a two-person career, in which both partners' cooperative efforts are needed to be successful.[4] Karrin Vasby Anderson argues that first ladies have achieved

significant political agency from within traditional norms of femininity by "cultivating" a "'social' political style."[5] Molly Wertheimer advocates that each first lady must "invent" a public persona from which to address multiple audiences.[6] Parry-Giles and Blair map the rise of the rhetorical first lady, contextualizing her public and political performances within the appropriate gender ideology to showcase how her role arose from gendered precedent and as such is still constrained by that standard.[7] Although previous work has proven to be immensely useful in thinking about the complex role of first lady, it has neglected to fully describe how the role is both constructed and reconstituted through public, rhetorical, acts.

This project asserts that by examining the intersection of the first lady role with citizenship, we can gain a more complete portrait of role's historic, rhetorical, and *public* significance. I begin by asking, "what are the conditions of possibilities for the first lady to offer an embodiment of citizenship?" and the argument I advance in this dissertation is one that strikes a balance between the historical progression of the role, the individual women who have shaped it, as well as recognition that it is indeed one of public service. Through thee case studies, I accentuate citizenship—not wife, persona, or partner to the president—to highlight the publicness of this historically required role. Such an emphasis is important, I maintain, if we are to make progress in modeling equality in citizenship, both in status and participation. To highlight the first lady in terms of citizenship requires an examination of how the role is *constructed* through rhetorical practice and civic engagement.[8] By backgrounding her private relationship to the president (i.e. her marriage) we enable a stronger appreciation of the public service

nature of her position, as well as a fuller understanding of how the first lady stands representative of women's opportunities in civic life.

In what follows, I consider the parameters of the first lady, as well as previously scholarly exploration of her role. In doing so I illustrate the utility of citizenship in conceptualizing both the first lady's complex role and individual identities of the women who serve in it. Outlining the major theories and contributions to citizenship studies, including recent work on the reconceptualization of what it means to be a "citizen," I highlight the potential for rhetorical citizenship to guide this unofficial role in the absence of formal duties. Finally, I offer an overview of the three case studies that I will ground this argument in. Each illuminates the ongoing rhetorical construction of the role, as well as the potential constraints and opportunities associated with a gendered citizen construction of the first lady.

Through these case studies I establish how the first lady-as-citizen is called forth to directly engage in acts for the advancement of the nation-state and the polity. Such a model brings into relief the *expected* public and political work of the role. It facilitates an appreciation of the first lady role as a national public servant as an alternative to spouse. Although in some ways these studies point to the endurance of the first lady role (and the potential viability of the first spouse role when a woman is elected president) it also articulates the limitations of a role originally circumscribed by marriage—not only as gendered—but steeped in assumptions of race and class as well.

The First Lady of the United States

Generally taking shape in the mid-1980s, inquiries on the first lady exist in the form of historical accounts, anecdotal narratives, as well as critical analyses. For example, Betty Boyd Caroli's well-cited book *First Ladies* has been updated and republished four times since its debut in 1987. Her take on the growth and constraints of the role covers both historic and anecdotal material on each first lady, offering a well-rounded understanding of the role and the individual women who have served in it.[9] Scholars continue to explore the unofficial but expected duties of the first lady and pointing out reoccurring functions of the role.[10] Robert Watson assigns no less than eleven specific duties the first lady is expected to perform; he also publishes "The Report to the First Lady," as a guide for incoming women, the latest published in 2009 for Michelle Obama.[11] Others examine how the first lady wields her social power, including Edith Mayo, former curator of the Smithsonian's exhibit on the first lady, who writes about the political impact of the first lady's social role.[12] Catherine Allgor and Karrin Vasby Anderson have expanded that work. Anderson observes how first ladies have employed their social power as political agency; Allgor's book on "parlor politics" looks at the early days of Washington D.C. and the ways "Washington women," used their private sphere connections to build "extraofficial structures" needed for our newly forming government.[13] These foundational texts are essential to understanding the historic roots that still exist in the role today as they also point us to consider the privatized origins of the role and its public possibilities.

Although the title of "First Lady" has only been widely accepted and recognized since the mid-nineteenth century, the role itself was being established at the same time the presidency was being codified.[14] Specifically, as the role of the president was drafted, special consideration was given to the president's wife, who was entrusted to maintain appropriate "social style" during the formation of the new republic.[15] From throwing parties and holding state dinners, to entertaining the wives of other politicians and the general public, hosting and social politicking quickly became part of the role's unofficial charge.[16] Similarly, because the U.S. president was to be tasked as both the head of state, in ceremonial terms, and as head of government, requiring major legislative involvement, he frequently relied on members of his family to represent him when he could not be present. As such, the first lady was often asked to represent her husband during ceremonial functions, including hosting guests at the White House, and later in campaigning efforts. This level of visibility has allowed many first ladies to attain significant social prominence.[17]

Indeed, despite their "unelected," and unsalaried position, first ladies have been wielding social influence over politics from the earliest days of our nation. Mayo argues, "[f]rom the inception of our country, the first lady's role as social hostess has been pivotal in creating a distinctive national style, one befitting a republic, including the ordinary citizen as a public participant in governing, but projecting the dignity, power, and authority of the presidential administration."[18] By establishing and keeping customs, norms, and rules for diplomacy, politics, and lobbying, all under the veil of "entertaining" first ladies have been asserting power. [19] "Far from merely throwing

wonderful parties," Mayo notes, "the first lady's role as social and ceremonial partner to the president has had significant political impact and become an integral part of the presidential administration."[20] This "private space," often considered "unofficial space," is generally considered outside the realm of politics, but as Allgor argues, "[i]n the realm of politics, the unofficial sphere is as crucial as the official sphere."[21]

During the nineteenth century, the lines between private/public work began to blur. First ladies were called to take their domestic expertise outside the home, especially in time of war and to help care for the nation. During this time, the role becomes aligned with the "republican motherhood," a role that charged women with the responsibility of caring for the health and patriotism of the nation by attending to its men, women, and children.[22] Though the activities of the republican mother demanded a more "active" role in society, the nature of the work maintained ideological commitment to domestic issues. Thus, while women gained power through public visibility, they simultaneously reified their space as inherently private. The work of a republican mother was considered a civic duty under the assumption that "being a good citizen also meant being a good mother."[23] By the late nineteenth century the values of republican motherhood were overlapping with concepts of the "ideal woman." In this sense, "being a good first lady meant hailing, modeling, and promoting publicly the civic values that good mothers historically instilled."[24] As first ladies performed tasks associated with the republican motherhood, they shaped a lasting tradition of feminized service to the nation. As Kristy Maddux claims, first ladies began to purse their own advocacy platforms, but they continued to be defined by feminine and domestic interests.[25]

Indeed, as first ladies continued to volunteer, gain leadership experience, and take their "domestic" concerns to the public platform, their performances as citizens became more visible and directly political. Over time, particular situations enabled them to occasionally step over the gendered public/private boundaries.[26] While most first ladies continued a *feminine* performance that allowed access to private influence and power, others vied for more overtly *feminist* enactments, which often became targets of public criticism, yet nevertheless worked to redefine the role's space in the public sphere.[27] In many cases, both performances contributed to the increasing agency of the institution of first lady, particularly from a communication perspective.[28]

For example, in considering the vast expansion of the role's rhetorical nature, Shawn Parry-Giles and Diane Blair offer detailed, archival, research, mapping the gradual, but steady rise of the "rhetorical first lady," and how the pursuits of individual women shaped the rhetorical expectations of the role. [29] In her 2005 book *Leading Ladies of the White House*, Molly Wertheimer noted that "[r]esearch on first ladies in the disciplines of rhetoric and communication has been limited, but is increasing"—and indeed, it has. That same year Maurine Beasley published a book on first ladies and the press, chronicling their news coverage. Ultimately, Beasley argues the press needs to take their coverage of the first lady more seriously, as the role increases its effect on the political system. Lisa Burns continues this work in her 2008 book, where she examines news coverage of first ladies across the span of the twentieth-century. More recently, Shawn Parry-Giles, using a critical lens that blends nationalism, character, authenticity and gender politics, traces out how U.S. news media has covered Hillary Clinton through

her time as first lady to her presidential bid in 2008.[30] These studies highlight a worthy and ongoing trend of discussing the impact first ladies can create through their rhetorical outreach.

Indeed, despite all first ladies being considered influential and powerful whether "behind the scenes" or in more public ways, Ann Grimes argues that "[i]n order to further women's agency in the political sphere, the 'overt, not cover, power' of first ladies must be recognized."[31] Thus, we are urged to uncover the sexist assumptions surrounding the first ladyship, as well as the way in which stereotypes constrain all women in the public sphere.[32] Anderson suggests that the potential to continue to breaking down these stereotypes lies in the recognition that women have individual and complex identities, just as we think of their male counterparts.[33] To this point, scholarly exploration has touched on several of the inherent double binds first ladies face in the public spotlight not only as women, but as inherently *public* women.

Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, a prominent figure in feminist Communication Studies, has led a more critical approach to understanding the first lady, first with her discussion of the presidency as a two-person career, but also examining larger relationships and cultural anxieties surrounding women and power, especially with Hillary Clinton. Notably, Karrin Vasby Anderson has continued this legacy, with several articles speaking to the larger cultural containment of women that extends to and from the first lady, as well as the impact of gender on their path from "spouses to candidates." First ladies in the context of feminism has provided a useful framework from which to understand how cultural shifts in vocabulary, contexts, and understanding of "women,"

produce opportunities and constraints for first ladies as activists, feminists, but also promoters of traditional womanhood. In essence, these studies have helped us understand how the first lady role truly represents a paradox, a site of both feminist advancement and at the same time, traditional femininity.[34] This work has also compelled my own questions about the first lady, particularly how the role persists, how public acts shape and reconstitute the role, and the potential of fully recognizing the first lady role as one of public service. In particular, it has led to curiosity about the viability of citizenship as a useful framework for understand these public acts. In recognizing identity is complex, citizenship becomes a productive way to supplement the literature on the first lady to continue to push the "overt" boundaries of her work.

As a symbolic label, "citizen" is a useful framework for thinking about the role of first lady. As a status, it draws our attention to the distinctive nature of this public service role. As a rhetorical performance, it both creates and recreates responsibilities that become its substance, shifting over time to meet societal expectations. Thinking about the first lady as citizen offers a more concretized conceptualization about how the ongoing performance of the role is rooted in particular historical needs, instead of being simply a "product of circumstance." Thus, the framework I'm arguing for is one that views the first lady as a purposeful product of our nation's founding, indelibly projecting a model of citizenship.

Gender & Citizenship

Questioning the first lady's relationship to citizenship requires a closer look at how we understand citizenship itself. We can trace the concept as a status most clearly

through the tension between the "rights," and "obligations" it often symbolizes. However, all considerations of the citizenship are also continuously marked by difference, particularly through gender. Recognizing differences in who counts as "citizens", and what counts as "citizenship" and "civic engagement" throughout history, women have invented ways to "participate" in public life, even when full inclusion as recognized citizens has not been available.

As a formal, legal, and technical entity, citizenship "can be traced back at least as far as the foundations of democracy in the Athenian polis and Aristotle's *Politics*" where men and women are inclined to self-rule.[35] Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman offer the orthodox view of citizenship "is, by definition, a matter of treating people as individuals with equal rights under the law."[36] However, the possibilities for theorizing are "potentially limitless."[37] Models for U.S. citizenship are grounded in two historic traditions. Stemming from the citizenship "as status" vs. "desirable activity" debate (or "rights v. obligations"), the classic liberal tradition (liberalism) is rooted in the political theory of John Locke and the economics of Adam Smith. Civic republicanism, can trace back through Jean Jacques Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, Niccolò Machiavelli, and even further to their preoccupation with the participative democracies of the ancient Greeks and Romans.[38]

More specifically, liberalism has contributed to the understanding of universal citizenship, based on its declaration that all individuals are born free and equal.[39] From this assumption, we see a version of citizenship that is reduced to legal status, often discussed as a "rights" based. In the liberal tradition, citizens are free to exercise their

rights, so long as they do not break the law. Maddux points out, these rights vary and change, but often include voting, running for public office, serving on juries, and simply "inhabiting" a nation.[40] The "public realm" that accompanies liberal views of citizenship is somewhat limited and was created in a universal and rational manner that relegated particularity and difference to the private."[41] Political matters may be settled in the public so that individuals can enjoy and pursue individual interests privately. Thus, the public/private divide is central, not only to the assertion of individual liberty, but also to the power of exclusion that stems from the liberal tradition.

Conversely, as an extreme form of participative democracy, following the traditions of Rousseau and Mill, the "civic republican" tradition (sometimes labeled a "communitarian perspective") sits in opposition to the individual privacy afforded in liberalism, positing that citizens cannot live so unencumbered by society.[42] "Citizenship thus becomes the project of cooperatively seeking the good for a community, *as* a community, rather than as self-interested individuals."[43] As Oldfield notes, the civic republican tradition believes that "[p]olitical participation enlarges the minds of individuals, familiarizes them with interest which lie beyond the immediacy of personal circumstance and environment, and encourages them to acknowledge that public concerns are the proper ones to which they should pay attention."[44] Those subscribing to civic republicanism emphasize the value of "the common good."[45]

Despite their differences, both classic views of citizenship are rooted in notions of modern political thought that assumed universality of citizenship "in the sense of citizenship for all implies . . . that citizenship status transcends particularity and

difference."[46] However, both in status and enactment, citizenship in both these strains has often been unavailable to women, marking the concept with considerable constraints. For example, the public/private divide of liberalism has served to exclude women from the public sphere, confining them to the private, just as civic republicanism barred to women from voting, running for office, or having a say in the "common good." Moreover, these models cannot be divorced from the rise of the modern nation-state, and the often overdetermined relationship between gender, race, and citizenship associated with that system.[47]

For example, Belinda Stillion Southard's work on militant citizenship recognizes the struggle for national identity on behalf of women, while focusing on efforts to expand citizenship opportunities and quest for belonging within the nation-state.[48] Hector Amaya, who explores Latina/o immigrant politics is not interested in expansion and instead argues that "citizenship" is no longer a productive concept, as any formal relationship with the nation-state is ultimately rooted in exclusion, racism, and colonialism.[49] Similarly, Karma Chávez insists scholars look "beyond inclusion" in citizenship, and instead focus on coalitional politics. Chávez maintains that despite exploring appeals for citizenship made on behalf of women, minorities, and immigrants, scholars are still taking for granted the ideals associated with "citizen," and ignoring the possibilities of reframing those appeals that challenge the basis of citizenship as associated with the nation-state.[50] Beyond expansion and rejection of more normative iterations of citizenship, scholars have also made important inroads tracing out the historical foundations and modern implications of *why* and *how* citizenship functions

differently for women, in particular. As a result, citizenship, variously defined, is far from universal, and always particular.

Attempting to explain why women are often left "missing" from our narratives surrounding state power, citizenship, nationalism, and democracy Joan Nagel, proposes that all of these narratives themselves can be understood as "masculinist projects, involving masculine institutions, masculine processes…"[51] While women have certainly been a part of these projects, she argues that the major roles are written by and for men; "women are, by design, supporting actors whose roles reflect masculinist notions of femininity and of women's proper 'place.'"[52] Whereas the culture of nationalism is construed within masculine themes and to reinforce a culture of masculinity, Nagel notes that women "occupy a distinct, symbolic role in nationalist culture, discourse and collective action, a role that reflects a masculinist definition of femininity and of women's proper place in the nation."[53] She hypothesizes that because of this, women are more adrift, likely to be seen as private and linked to "women's issues," and inherently be less valued. Rhetorical scholars echo these sentiments, while also offering a variety of opportunities through which women have coped with these restrictions.

Historically, women in the United States had no influence on the laws that governed their lives, and were both legally and formally excluded from expressing citizenship. Thus because citizenship expressions have been limited to men, the characteristics that define "citizenship" are often tied to masculinity, and performances of white, male, bodies to the point that such characteristics become naturalized as essential and foundational to the concept.[54] Maddux asserts that in contemporary times,

"[w]omen who now exercise the privileges of citizenship must negotiate these masculine characteristics and risk being labeled "unfeminine" as they do so."[55] Facing this double bind, female citizens have developed socially acceptable alternatives, namely, distinct feminine modes of civic participation. They have also participated in overt challenges to male-dominated expressions of citizenship, attempting to insert themselves into a (masculinized) universal ideal of "citizen." For example, the ideals of the republican motherhood eventually allowed women to leave the privacy of their homes to bring their domestic expertise to other women and children, in public. Likewise, "feminine style," as conceptualized by Campbell, offered an alternative approach to public speaking that validated women's participation in civic life through a reorientation of traditional (read: masculine) political reasoning.[56]

Alternative approaches to thinking about citizenship as more inclusive has also been sought by political theorists. For example, one opportunity in which they have attempted to account specifically for women's unique positon as citizens is through maternal citizenship. In this view of citizenship, mothering and the practices it encompasses, teaches women about the responsibility of life and the lessons that should guide principles of political life.[57] Most notably emerging from the work of Jean Elshtain and Sara Ruddick maternal citizenship focuses on family and mother as the "school" of responsibility.[58] According to Mary Dietz, Ruddick advances the idea that "maternal thinking" constitutes an antidote to male dominated culture, and provides women "a way to be in the world."[59] Similarly, Elshtain advances the maternal cause in the form of "social feminism," which ties women's identities wholly to motherhood. In

this view, Elshtain critiques the individualistic worldview of liberalism, countering that women's private encounters in the family are not "one identity" among others, but rather their primary identity. Maternal citizenship then, privileges the private sphere as a model for public life; the private realm has both priority and moral superiority over the political.[60]

In rhetorical scholarship, Sara Hayden utilizes aspects of this theory in her exploration of the "Million Mom March." Recognizing that maternity has provided an important reason for women's participation in the public sphere, maternal citizenship can be viewed as a way to "legitimize[d] women's public relationships to the state, the community, and the workplace."[61] Examining the protest for comprehensive gun control, she argues that the Million Mom March demonstrates women's use of maternal experiences, sensibilities, and discursive styles to promote a "political and moral order in which the values of caring, empathy, and nurturance are privileged."[62] Ultimately, she uses the "nation-as-family" metaphor to argue for the potential value of the event and maternal appeals for gender politics. Scholars disagree, however, about the effectiveness of maternal politics and more generally, the potential to reify gender norms and essentialism in political battles.[63] Some of these limitations can be seen in women's overt challenges to the male-dominated public sphere.

For example, Angela Ray examines how women appropriated the masculine voting ritual in the late 1860s and 1870s "as participatory, persuasive argument in an ongoing public controversy about the parameters of the U.S. polity."[64] As hundreds of women attempted to register/vote in the rituals of civic participation, thus protesting

discourses that defined "voter" as masculine, authorities were forced to publicly comment and articulate their own premises in serious debate, revealing the profoundly gendered nature of the cultural assumptions about who constituted "the people." Examining news reports of these women voting, Ray argues that "whereas the conceptual foundation upon which many of the voting performances were claimed to rest was a strong natural rights argument… embodied performances made meaning through gendered, racial, and class conventions."[65] These portrayals of "women as voters" were presented as having the potential to impact millions. Political participation, then, became "powerfully personal" as the ritual located individual action within collective responsibility.[66] However, as Ray points out, the paradox of embodiment for these women was still clear. Demonstrating competence required women to act like and embody masculinity, but social conventions of femininity made it impossible for bodily appearance of these women to appear as gender, race, and class neutral abstractions. Ray's study, underscores the need for more rhetorically oriented views of citizenship, as discursive practices constitute a major way in which women have attempted to perform citizenship.

Susan Zaeske's essay about women's antislavery petitions in the United States Antebellum era illustrates one such attempt. Excluded from normative practices of political subjectivity, women marked their identity via their signature, through the actual signing of the petition and symbolically, as "the discursive emblems of the formation of political subjectivity."[67] Zaeske notes that the petition held radical potential for women to insert themselves into public discussion and insinuate that they were able to

participate in the political sphere. By casting the petition in the feminine form of prayer and gaining entry to the political space, women subverted their subordination by symbolically replicating themselves within it. According to Zaeske "Female signatures on antislavery petitions, then, constituted affirmations of women's right to express their opinions as individuals, as independent from male protectors, and provide evidence of women exerting political agency."[68] Her case study offers a fascinating look into a discursive processes that increased women's participation in public debate and renegotiated their status as citizens.

Although the first lady has and continues to face many of the same gender constraints as the average woman-citizen, we ought not to assume that her citizen performances are constructed or maintained in the same way. The high public visibility, coupled with the political nature of her role, brings into relief a model of citizenship that must adhere to gender norms, while simultaneously breaking them—some by demand of the role (e.g. serving as a public figure through campaigning, fostering a relationship with the press, promoting the agenda of the president) and other times when she is afforded the personal opportunity to do so (e.g. creating new public platforms to support important issues, speaking out on controversial topics, becoming involved in legislation/political affairs). Further, as a figure so clearly tethered to the nation-state, she is afforded a unique set of opportunities and constraints as a symbolic civic actor.

In particular, two central characteristics of citizenship are useful in framing the first lady: citizenship as political and citizenship as rhetorical. According to David Zarefsky "Citizenship is the enactment of the individual's relationship to the polity,

whether it is local, state or regional, national, or global."[69] Despite its gendered title, the role of first lady of the United States is a political, public service, role. Dissociating the first lady role from the political ignores the formally unspecified, but expected public work the women who fill it are called to perform. In fact, though most women who have served as first lady have also been married to the president, several substitutes have filled this role in cases of an absent wife.[70] Though most first lady scholars focus on the public nature of the role (e.g. their communication strategies, rhetorical personas, etc.), it most often is related back to the role's private origin (i.e. marriage). Foregrounding the first lady's relationship to the polity, then, means taking seriously the construction of her role as political, not because she is often the wife of the president, but rather a public servant, called by society to fulfill particular expectations. Such a reading bares relevance on how we construct women's civic engagement throughout history as well as their relationship to the political and public sphere.

Second, as Zarefsky notes, citizenship is made active by its rhetorical character.[71] This means that participation in public discourse and deliberation is the material of civic engagement, not simply a precursor to some "real action." Understanding citizenship through rhetorical action allows us to consider citizenship as performative, through symbolic discursive acts, such as campaigning or hosting meetings, but also more subversive modes, such as dissent, silence, and non-action.[72] Such a reading of citizenship also highlights its shifting nature and ability to change and evolve over time. As the first lady has no official duties or charges spelled out by the Constitution or Congress, her role has been created through rhetorical and performative means.

Traditions are preserved through precedent, and societal expectations are conveyed through the press. As Lisa Burns notes the media's framing of "proper" first lady performance both legitimizes and discounts what becomes acceptable activities of the role.[73] What is significant to both aspects is the emphasis on rhetorical agency within this role to maintain, expand, and constrain.

Theorizing the First Lady Citizen

When we think about theorizing about first lady as a citizen, a rhetorical perspective is well-suited to understand the continual evolution within the role, as well as its permeability. Although women who have filled the role change, the first lady (and the first family) is an ideal. Thus, a material embodiment of each individual woman is important, but so too are the ways the "role," as a combination of rhetorical performances, is maintained and carried out for a variety of purposes. As Wertheimer points out, "Ever since first ladies have become aware of their power to influence, increasingly have they used that power rhetorically to advance their husbands' and their own agendas."[74] Though Wertheimer concludes that all political duties associated with her role are also rhetorical processes, (and thus worthy of attention) I want to go further and suggest the role is a reflective of a type of rhetorical citizenship. One in which offers continual guidance in the absence of formal duties; the first lady is anchored by her civic duties, both political and domestic, because they always take place in the public sphere (through commemoration, overt rhetorical action, as well as how the press constructs them). These symbolic performances, represent a rhetorical obligation, that when performed, continues to reconstruct the role.

To understand citizenship as rhetorical is to recognize that what it means to be and participate as a citizen goes beyond formal status, rights, and obligations. To distinguish citizenship as rhetorical is to accept that discourse and actions between and amongst citizens, or those related to the polity in some way, constitutes citizenship. As Christan Kocka and Lisa Villadsen note, rhetorical citizenship, most basically, highlights that "laws, rights, and material conditions are not the only constituents of citizenship;" that discourse amongst citizens or "rhetoric in society" is equally important to consider."[75] As previously mentioned, Zarefsky also draws our attention to citizenship's rhetorical nature, in that it is performative: citizenship can be identified in discursive acts.[76] These acts, which have been theorized by a number of rhetorical scholars, can include official understandings of citizenship such as voting, campaigning, and petitioning, but they can also be those acts which are rhetorically crafted and performed in variety of ways by a diverse set of individuals.

In 2004 Robert Asen offered a proactive reorientation to civic engagement by theorizing citizenship as a "mode of public engagement," thus shifting our questions from "what counts" to "how do people enact citizenship?"[77] A "mode" of citizenship denotes "how" citizenship proceeds, not what it is. Modes highlight agency, and signals wider field of "civic engagement." Asen's theory importantly asks us to consider how "citizenship appears as a performance, not a possession."[78] Following this work, Maddux explores Kymlicka and Norman's "citizenship-as-desirable-activity" to balance the legal status, concluding that although citizenship may be combination of both these articulations, the concept still lacks.[79] Interested in the "discursive resources" that make

activism possible, Maddux offers her book on gender, Christianity, and citizenship, as an exploration of how civic engagement is "a disposition as much as it is a set of acts, and that the possibilities for this disposition are expansive."[80]

Indeed, scholars continue to stretch that "expansive" notion of citizenship, including Raymie E. McKerrow who theorizes about rhetorical citizenship in its relationship to rhetorical agency.[81] McKerrow argues that while not everyone is counted as a "citizen" in a legal or technical sense, individuals can still *enact* citizenship through rhetorical agency. McKerrow advocates "non-action" as expression or enactment of citizenship that is worthy of consideration as discursive processes, including silence and dissensus.[82] Further still from the "what counts" model, Karma Chávez (2015) presents a more radical "way to understand Rhetoric's intellectual history: as a citizenship *narrative*."[83] Lamenting that "…Rhetoric scholars are concerned almost exclusively with citizen discourses, mostly from white men in *public*," Chávez argues that we must break from that history, not so we can simply become more "inclusive" in what/who counts as citizenship, but so we can be entirely different: "a discipline constituted through non-normative, non-citizen, non-Western perspectives and ways of knowing and being."[84]

Though each of these scholars differs in the means by which they want to enlarge or change understandings of citizenship, the common assumption is that the concept *is* expansive, should account for performative acts, and foreground discursive methods through which individuals engage the world around them. When rhetoricians theorize about citizenship they continually go beyond the measureable traits, and think broader about the conditions under which civic engagement is taking place. For many, these

questions are rooted in claims to inclusivity, some focus on the constraints posed to citizenship as a useful model for civic life, and for others it is do develop new ways of being and knowing altogether. This commonality, however, is seen in a broader understanding that a rhetorical perspective offers in viewing the world.

A rhetorical perspective is one that begins with the premise that language, symbols, and discourse (written and otherwise), are never devoid of argument. Although any particular text may "exist" in material reality, its placement, arrangement, perceived worth, are rhetorical qualities, that is, they make arguments to their viewers and listeners. Similarly, there is much agreement among scholars that a rhetorical perspective is a contextual one, situated discourses being just that—situated.[85] Most essentially, a rhetorical perspective assumes that all discourse reflects choice, and those choices have consequences (rhetorical and material).

A rhetorical method, then, involves interest in how the world is constructed through language, symbols, and discourse. Following a long tradition of rhetorical scholars, many with competing beliefs, most basically, I adhere to the assumption that individuals do not use language passively to interact with their surroundings. Rather, language is used to actively participate in the continuous construction and reconstruction of the world.[86] This rhetorical perspective implies that language shapes, and quite literally, constructs, *how* we understand events; language forms our reality. More specifically, rhetoric is not simply a particular property of a text or object, but instead a process that exists in *all* discursive practices."[87]

Dissertation Structure

In this dissertation, I on draw on a framework that further asserts the rhetorical character of citizenship through careful examination of public discourse from and about first ladies. Such examination is guided by the following questions:

- How does the role of first lady offer a particular embodiment of citizenship in the public sphere?
- What are the constraints and opportunities of foregrounding the first lady as a public role/citizen?
- What are the rhetorical mechanisms that help explain how the informal role persists?

Through a focus on the intersection of citizenship, rhetoric and the first lady, I call forth a consideration of role's historical and on-going performance, as a purposeful product of sociopolitical exigencies. I offer an understanding of how, in the absence of formalized duties, the first lady position persists, and exemplifies an embodiment of citizenship, crafted and carried out through rhetorical means. By examining purposeful discourse within society, I showcase how the role's expectations are constructed, how the women who have held it are called to respond, and how doing so solidifies their performance as embodied-citizen. I find that the mode of "lady citizenship" that emerges is often overdetermined by issues of not only gender, but also race and class. The first lady maintains agency as a citizen by upholding the gendered, racial, and classed aspects of the historical role, rooted in a liberal understanding of what it means to be a citizen.

Nevertheless, this study does uncover several rhetorical mechanisms by which the role perseveres under such constrained circumstances.

In the first case study, I consider the ways that society and the first lady participate in the ongoing construction, projection, and reification of the role as rhetorical citizen. That is, how the duties and qualities of the public nature of the role persist and become carried out by future generations of first ladies/spouses. Nowhere better does this debate coalesce than around the "auditioning" season of first lady potentials. As candidates' spouses hit the campaign trails, all of America watches and reacts to their every move, keeping score of how well they might fill the historic role. Through their reports and commentary during this time, the press participates in the rhetorical reconstruction and subsequent reification of the first lady's civic and symbolic qualities.

Specifically, this case study offers an understanding of the ongoing and significant shifts in the press coverage of Michelle Obama throughout the 2008 election season by considering not only issues of race and class, but also the institutional role of first lady. I focus on conceptualizing the first lady as a Symbolic Citizen, whose meaning is largely constructed and maintained by the press. Examining print news coverage from three mainstream outlets: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Associated Press* beginning at the end of the Primary Election season and ending after Inauguration, this study identifies the civic rituals, behaviors, and expectations the press articulates for first lady potentials. Ultimately, I contend the press must narrate Michelle Obama's journey to the first ladyship as one of transformation so

that she is able to transcend the racial barriers of the role and assume the position of the "Symbolic Citizen." This analysis highlights the often covert mechanisms by which the first lady's civic role as an emblem reifies the characteristics of the role so closely tied to white privilege/white womanhood.

The second case study examines Lady Bird Johnson's 1964 whistle stop tour *The Lady Bird Special.* As a response to the changing Southern landscape of the 1960s, resulting from the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as well as unrest within the Dixie Democrats, Lady Bird's Whistle Stop tour was the first ever solo campaign, designed and executed by the first lady without her husband on his behalf. On October 6, 1964 Lady Bird Johnson boarded a train headed south from Washington D.C. to advocate on behalf of her husband's re-election and dedication to civil rights. Traveling for four days and making 47 stops, the first lady addressed close to 500,000 rural Southerners.[88] This case study seeks to look broadly at this moment, engaging with the situation's layered context, 28 of the stump speeches given by Lady Bird Johnson along the campaign, along with press releases, news reports, and other materials released by the White House regarding the campaign.

I think about the larger possibilities surrounding how the first lady was able to position herself as a regional citizen as a rhetorical resource to enter, engage, and effect change in the South. Drawing on the recent work in rhetorical studies to resuscitate the importance of physical space and region, as well as attention the South's longstanding regional backdrop, I explore how Lady Bird's rhetorical performance expands our definition contextual elements associated with citizenship and regional belonging. I

suggest Lady Bird's campaign as a civic performance is fundamentally tied to a shared regional understanding of place and culture. This chapter furthers the call to attend to the "performative dimensions of space" that allow for such performances as it amplifies the productive opportunities of re-imaging a more fluid understanding of citizenship and belonging tied to performances of regionality.[89]

In the final case study, I examine the visual rhetorical opportunities to construct the first lady as citizen in sites of commemoration. The scope of this study includes six presidential museums, including that of Lyndon Johnson, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush, as well as the Smithsonian's exhibit on the first lady in the American History Museum. By privileging the visual forms of museum exhibits, include images, layout, and design, I examine how the public is asked to understand the first lady's embodiment of citizenship, including how her relationship to the polity, president, and gender are curated.

I argue that the first lady's citizen-status is largely contained and disengaged from the polity. Specifically, juxtaposed against the president as the "common citizen," the first lady is confined by circumstance of her role, including exceptional domesticity. Although performative shifts in the first lady role are framed as growth in rhetorical action, her work is always contained as other-centered. We cannot position ourselves in her role, because her role is to serve us. I suggest that ultimately lends to a reading of the first lady role that is frivolous, unimportant, and unnecessary, instead of remembering the unpaid, unelected, public serve devoted by these women. It is likely that visitors,

especially those who identify as women, are reinforced with the belief that women's role in public service is indeed, secondary, and should be remembered as such.

The three studies that constitute this dissertation draw on rhetorical methods and theories to examine the "moments" that illuminate when, how, and why the first lady is constituted as a citizen, as well as how the rhetorical construction of the first lady role occurs, shifts, and is stabilized. Although the three studies do not offer anywhere close to an exhaustive examination of the first lady role, they provide insight into the civic persona and trajectory of the "lady citizen." Indeed, at a time when scholars and the public alike are beginning to reconsider what it means to be a citizen as both a "status" and in practice, I contend this exploration is useful in in our gradual transformation towards more inclusive, unique, and viable methods for that redefinition. The *Lady Citizen* presents an explorative challenge to the prevailing tendency to personalize/privatize both the role and the women who serve in it, so that we may begin to reconsider the explicit ways women citizens are called to and choose to act in public.

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[3] Molly J. Wertheimer, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Leading Ladies of the White House: Communication strategies of notable twentieth-century first ladies* (Lanham: Rowmand & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2005) 1-15; Anderson, “The first lady: A site of American womanhood,” 17-30.
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[5] Anderson, “The first lady: A site of American womanhood,” 22.
[6] Molly J. Wertheimer, “Editor’s Introduction,” 1-15.
[7] Parry-Giles and Blair, “The rise of the rhetorical first Lady:” 565-600.
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[16] See Anderson, “The first lady: A site of American womanhood,” 17-30.Parry-Giles and Blair, “The rise of the rhetorical first Lady:” 565-600; Mayo, “Party Politics,” 577-590.
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[22] See Campbell, “The Rhetorical Presidency,” 179-195; Dubriwny, “Constructing breast cancer in the news,” 104-125; Parry-Giles and Blair, “The rise of the rhetorical first Lady:” 565-600.
[23] Parry-Giles and Blair, “The rise of the rhetorical first Lady:” 576.
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For a more expanded explanation of the criticism feminist enactments entail see: Campbell, "The discursive performance of femininity,” 1998, 1-19.

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[43] Holloway Sparks, "Dissident citizenship: Democratic theory, political courage, and activist women." *Hypatia* 12, (1997): 77-78.
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2. CONSTRUCTING THE "SYMOBLIC" CITIZEN: MICHELLE OBAMA AS POTENTIAL FIRST LADY

As Lisa Burns points out in her book *First Ladies and the Fourth Estate*, "The press coverage of women in politics is an artifact of this country's age-old but unresolved debate over women citizens' proper role versus 'proper women's' place."[1] Indeed, and nowhere better does this debate coalesce than around the "auditioning" season of first lady potentials. As candidates' spouses hit the campaign trails, all of America watches and reacts to their every move, keeping score of how well they might fill the historic role. Through their reports and commentary during this time, the press participates in the rhetorical reconstruction and subsequent reification of the First Lady's civic and symbolic qualities. In the 2008 election Michelle Obama undeniably brought to this mix an added layer of complexity, but also possibility, as the press grappled with the potential for the first African American first lady. As *The New York Times* commented, "There are some who think it will be harder for America to accept a black first lady -- the national hostess who serenely presides over the White House Christmas festivities and the Easter egg roll – [sic] than a black president."[2]

On February 10, 2007 Barack Obama officially announced his candidacy for the upcoming presidential election. The following November he would be elected as the first African American President of the United States, taking 53% of the vote. Beginning in May of 2007, his wife, Michelle Obama, would join the campaign full time, leaving her career as a lawyer for a top hospital in Chicago. Although the Obama campaign would

come to represent "hope and change" for the nation, it would also leave the American press and public considering with what it would mean to have a black president and first lady. Michelle Obama, in particular, struggled to maintain a stable media narrative throughout the election season. With counterparts like Bill Clinton, a former president, and Elizabeth Edwards, praised on both sides of the political aisle for her grace in handling her terminal cancer, Michelle Obama occupied a delicate position. As *The New York Times* pointed out: "Mrs. Obama's is the trickiest of political performances. She is a black woman in a campaign in which no one knows quite what role race or gender will play."[3]

Indeed, during her standard stump speeches she avoided "sunny" topics and discussed controversial issues such as education and inequality.[4] Yet, her controversial and outspoken nature left Americans wondering if she did in fact fully support her spouse's run for the White House. Michelle was continually assessed as an "asset or liability" by the press.[5] In early 2008 she was heavily criticized by both the right and the left for making a now infamous statement in which she claimed she was proud of her country for the first time in her adult life, now that her husband was running for president. Republicans called her "unpatriotic," "rude," and "ungrateful."[6] Reports of this nature helped construct a circulating caricature of her as the "angry black woman."[7]

However, leading up to and after the Democratic National Convention in late August 2008, an unmistakable "softening" seemed to occur in both in Michelle Obama herself, as well as the press coverage about her, and the public took notice. From talk show appearances that flaunted her off the rack style, to her public commitment to be the

"mom in chief" at the DNC, Michelle quickly became a palatable choice for first lady. By Election Day, many wondered whether she would completely pioneer the role or ultimately showcase the limitations of working motherhood in America. Inauguration brought praise for her agenda focused on women and military families, commitment to her girls, as well as the "personal" vibe felt at inaugural festivities.[8]

This case study seeks to understand the ongoing and significant shifts in the press coverage of Michelle Obama throughout the 2008 election season by considering not only issues of race and class, but also the institutional role of first lady. To do so, I will focus on conceptualizing the first lady as a Symbolic Citizen, whose meaning is largely constructed and maintained by the press. Symbolic Citizenship, I argue, conflates the ceremonial duties of the First Lady's performances with civic action. Importantly, since many of these qualities—from fashion to motherhood—are tied to white middle/upper class womanhood, a focus on Symbolic Citizenships brings into relief the role of race, class, and gender in this previously all-white institution. This intersectional approach highlights the ways that as a Symbolic Citizen, potential first ladies are expected to embody the narrowly defined norms of white, middle class, womanhood as part of their civic obligation to the nation-state.[9]

This study is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather provide a detailed account of one election year, when the race and class assumptions of what it means to be a "lady" were laid bare. This study seeks to identify and translate the civic rituals, behaviors, and expectations the press articulates for first lady potentials. To do so, I examine the print news coverage from three mainstream outlets: *The New York Times*, *The Washington*

Post, and *The Associated Press*, beginning at the end of the Primary Election season and ending after Inauguration.[10]

My analysis unfolds in three major sections. First, it retraces the first lady's relationship with the press, concluding with the symbolic civic acts the press used as criteria for judging potential first ladies during the 2008 election. These symbolic civic acts include "participation in fashion," "ability to represent American women," and partaking in the "tradition of transitions." Second, I consider how these symbolic civic acts are not only gendered, but raced and classed, when read alongside the institution of the First Lady. Finally, I demonstrate how Michelle Obama is rhetorically "transformed" by the press during the election coverage, as a way to fit her blackness into a white role. Ultimately, I contend the press must narrate Michelle Obama's journey to the first ladyship as one of transformation so that she is able to transcend the racial barriers of the role and assume the position of the "Symbolic Citizen." This analysis highlights the often covert mechanisms by which the first lady's civic role as an emblem reifies the characteristics of the role so closely tied to white privilege/white womanhood.

First Ladies and the Press

The first lady role is a difficult one to fulfill. Lacking a formal job description and "official" duties, it is a role based strongly in precedent.[11] Originally designed to help set and signify an "American" style of governing, social politicking, and hosting, it is no wonder that the public has long been interested in the role held by the wife of the president.[12] In assessing the office of first lady, Robert Watson specified no less than 11 duties that the first lady must perform, including: wife and mother, public figure and

celebrity, nation's social hostess, symbol of American womanhood, White House manager and preservationist, campaigner, social advocate and champion of social causes, presidential spokesperson, presidential and political party booster, diplomat, and political/presidential partner.[13] The list, which is in some ways comical, considering the unelected/unpaid nature of the first lady role, also serves as a reminder that although the American public is never certain exactly what they want or expect from the first lady, they are always quick to point out when she is out of line. Often times, this inquiry begins at before her tenure in the White House does—on the campaign trail.

First ladies are strategic components of presidential campaigns.[14] As with most long standing institutions, context is key to understanding how their role has shifted and evolved over time. For example, towards the end of the 19th century it became expected that first ladies would be a visible part of their husband's bid for the White House. What began as a "visual" role of simply appearing in public, transitioned into more deliberate activities such as "Front Porch" campaigns, where potential first ladies would wave to the public from their porch, symbolically joining the space between the private and public spheres. As women began emerging as a public presence in their own right, publicly advocating for the right to vote, and especially after 1920 when the 19th amendment passed, so too have first ladies become more involved in public communications surrounding campaigns. As Myra Gutin points out, after 1920, first ladies began a steady move from ceremonial figure to emerging spokeswoman. Today, Edith Mayo, former curator at the First Ladies exhibit at the Smithsonian, comments that

first ladies campaigning are "an integral part of every modern race of the White House."[15]

Of course, "standing between the first lady and the public is the ever- present press."[16] Like the American people, the press has always been interested in the first lady. Even Martha Washington, as she left the comfort of her home at Mount Vernon and traveled to the Nation's capital in New York, adapted to seeing her name in the newspaper.[17] Importantly, Lisa Burns points out that because few individuals regularly come in contact with the first lady, a majority of information about her comes from the media. By the early 1900s news articles about the first lady were a regular occurrence, and Edith Roosevelt was first to hire a social secretary to help manage the press. This would eventually lead to the use of press secretaries by first ladies, beginning with Lady Bird Johnson in 1964.[18] But it was Eleanor Roosevelt who truly established the right for first ladies to have a public presence in the press with her "women only" press conferences and newsworthy activities.[19] And indeed, as press coverage grew throughout the 20th century, so too did the first lady's role in the spotlight.

Maurine Beasley carefully traces out how Eleanor Roosevelt's "newspaper girls" shaped a new era of first ladies and their relationship with the press. Although several first ladies after Roosevelt would abandon such an open access approach, each left the institution of first lady with a new take on how to deal with and utilize the media. For instance, Beasley discusses Jackie Kennedy's careful management of image that led to the "construction of Camelot," and a more scripted first lady. She also points to Betty Ford and Roselynn Carter as products of their time during the rise of feminism, their use

of the press to speak openly about controversial issues drawing both media attention and hostility. Hillary Rodham Clinton is described as a "media polarizer" for her dual presence in the east and west wing. As these examples point out, the relationship between the first lady and the press is not a one way street, but rather shaped by the individual women who hold the role, contextual factors that impact the press, as well as access to the first lady herself.[20]

The challenges first ladies face managing their image has grown with the expansion of the media; as Wertheimer points out, it is now another unofficial duty to maintain working relations with the press—even if they say or do nothing.[21] Moreover, the press often uses "the first lady functions as a barometer of women's social and political status, reflecting shifting cultural views of American womanhood."[22] This system creates difficulties, as society often asks the First Lady to be traditional while also shifting with current expectations.[23] Similarly, because first ladies become "public women" through their relationship with the press, using it to communicate their issues and to "go public," they both exhibit political agency in their own right, but also run the risk of constant scrutiny. "Yet, because press coverage often focused on first ladies as wives, mothers, and homemakers, the same stories that constructed these women as public figures simultaneously reinforced the idea that women's primary domain continued to be within he home."[24] Burns identifies the media's fascination with the first lady role as a type of celebrity cult, in which the first lady is the cultural ideal/embodiment of American womanhood. As Beasley notes, against the backdrop of

male dominated news media, first ladies have long stood out as a visible group of American women.

Today, the press plays a major role "in transmitting both the image and the substance of a first lady."[25] As Beasley argues, journalists' interpretations of what first ladies say and do contributes to the perceptions of the public as to what role women play in American life. Thus, the media then helps shape the position based on what they cover and how. For example, by focusing on the ceremonial or social aspects of the role, the early American press defined the first lady as largely within the private sphere.[26] This type of coverage continued, and evolved, with a "scrutiny" component added. In other words, the press began to judge the performance of role. Winfield identifies five "measures" by which the press continues to judge the first lady, including: presidential escort, leader of social protocol, social advocate, policy makers, and political advisors. This blend of traditional roles (e.g. escort) and more progressive ones (e.g. policy maker) are often tied to how the press responds/represents the first lady.[27]

In particular, Burns examines how press framing has shaped stories about the first lady since Martha Washington. Journalists use narratives created that rely on characters, settings, and plots. However, because they have small space to work with, journalists utilize frames to organize stories into "concise packages."[28] Frames, Burns writes, are "organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world."[29] Frames draw upon prior knowledge to explain new information. Burns offers the example of a

"competition" frame in which characters are "contenders," engaged in "battle" and there is a winner and loser. In essence, frames provide structure for news stories.

Importantly, journalists frequently use frames in their stories about first ladies.[30] Gender framing is most frequently used. For women, this means their news coverage will always mention gender—"they are always identified as female."[31] Journalists draw on competing ideologies of gender that define womanhood and "by using gender ideals to frame the first lady's activities, journalists reinforce the idea that the performance of the first lady's duties is always gendered."[32] Often, a gendered frame promotes double binds for political women.[33] A double bind is a situation, which poses exactly two alternatives in which neither choice is the "right" choice. Instead, dichotomies are used to simply complex issues. For example, women who try to display both competence and femininity generally fail at one or both. Competency requires strength, wit, and rationality—traits associated with the public sphere, ruled by men. Femininity requires domestication, softness, nurturing—traits associated with the private sphere of women.[34] First ladies face the greatest double bind they are expected to perform private domestic work in the public eye.[35]

Another common frame journalists use in talking about the first lady is personification. Instead of talking about the tradition, precedent, and individual women who shaped the role gradually and over time, journalists rely on shortcuts that equate the entire institutional memory of the role into a single word, phrase, or name. As such, the first lady or presidential candidate's wife becomes "the embodiment of gender ideologies and represents for journalist's ideological definitions of American

womanhood."[36] That way the journalists can assess/judge a woman is fit for First Lady based on performance of gender. This often occurs in the use of historical events or persons. In particular, when a person is used as personification of the role, it is considered iconic framing. For example, journalists might note that the incoming first lady seems more like a "Hillary Clinton" than a "Laura Bush" to connote an activist/progressive personality over traditional/modest. These frames are reductive and provide limited understanding of a complex role, but are common in news stories about the first lady.

A handful of studies have looked at how Michelle Obama has been framed by the media and interpreted by the public and with important implications. Tiffany Shoop analyzed print media from three major news outlets, examining the coverage of Michelle Obama and Cindy McCain during the 2008 election. Her content analysis suggests that despite each woman being successful and balanced in her own right, the press continually focused on their "controversial" moments, including McCain's tax returns and Michelle Obama's "pride comments." Shoop contends that the media focus during the election season questioned the premise of successful woman "having it all," and still fitting the first lady mold.[37] Jonathan Knuckey and Myunghee Kim focused specifically on issues of race in Michelle Obama's approval ratings as first lady. Their study, which identifies "racial resentment" as a key variable impacting Michelle Obama's early approval ratings, helps us understand how racial attitudes shape political behaviors. They argue that the idea of first ladies as partisan symbols is becoming a major factor in the

election, impacting the assumption that the spouse of a presidential candidate or first lady is an asset who can "appeal beyond the partisan base."[38]

It is necessary to point out, however, that although the press plays a major role in the dissemination of the first lady image, the individual women who fill the role are not completely helpless when it comes to their presentation. That is, they do have say in their "image making" moments.[39] The issue, however, is that as representations of both the first lady office *and* American womanhood, reporters construct these women as "sites" for the negotiation of female identity.[40] As Anderson explains, for this reason the first lady post is a paradox—one of expansion and constraint for women's agency at large.

Previous studies have confirmed that the press plays an important part in the framing and understanding of the first lady role.[41] It is clear, especially from Lisa Burns' work, that the press uses gendered framing in its construction of the role. However, it remains to be seen how the press projects the first lady as a citizen. This analysis seeks to uncover how common themes in the discourse of the national print media both construct and reify the first lady as what I am calling the "Symbolic Citizen."

In examining the news coverage of Michelle Obama in 2008-2009 election season, I suggest the press identifies and defines prescriptive, symbolic, acts common to all first ladies. These include participation in fashion, identification with American women, as well as partaking in the traditions associated with transition. Further, the press articulates these acts as civic duties associated with the public good. That is, actions or interests a first lady is expected to uphold as part of her civic obligation to the

polity. In what follows, I showcase how these acts are not only gendered, but also reveal the importance of race and class in the ceremonial aspects of the first ladyship. Finally, how they are used as "criteria" by which the media (and thus the public) judge a first lady's fitness to hold the position, as with Michelle Obama in the 2008 election. I contend that each of these symbolic civic behaviors are the mechanisms by which the first ladyship maintains a stable sense of identity, even when the role is being projected onto a new woman.

The Symbolic Citizen

A Fashion Forward First Lady

An analysis of the 2008 election coverage of Michelle Obama suggests that future first ladies are expected to engage as a symbolic citizen by attending to matters of dress and fashion. As visible women in the public arena, first ladies have been setting trends since the conception of their role. In the 2008 press coverage, the media clearly points to the influence first ladies wield in trend setting, both in a historic sense as well as the implications for present day affairs.[42] As a writer for *The New York Times* notes: "The ensembles of the potential first ladies matter most of all because the position remains so stubbornly retro and so purely symbolic…"[43] Although some reporters point to the "discomforting idea" that we continue to judge a first lady solely on her appearance during this time, others impose the importance of the material impact of the first lady's relationship with fashion.[44] As *The New York Times* reports, "What the first lady wears has a lot of effect on the industry" as she "is seen every day in some form of media, and what she looks like is copied by other women.'"[45] Though a latitude of

acceptance exists depending on what particular style an individual woman might bring to the role, the press is clear that to be a successful first lady contender, she must become unofficial curators of American fashion. Through these stories, an "interest in fashion" is further translated from a ceremonial ideal to a civic duty. That is, to be good citizens, first ladies are to purchase and promote American designers.[46] At any point throughout American history, having the means to attend to, purchase, and model guidelines for appropriate dress signals a certain amount of wealth and a particular class in society. Indeed, the Smithsonian's exhibit on the first ladies almost exclusively focuses on fashion. As Jennifer Keohane argues, the public is asked to "appreciate the elite cultural artifacts on display" as conceived in a rhetoric of glamour.[47] I would add that this rhetoric and culture of glamour is founded and evolved solely on the participation of white womanhood until Michelle Obama's inclusion after 2008. In these ways, attention to fashion is not only gendered, but steeped in expectations of race and class.

In the 2008 press coverage, Michelle Obama is a point of praise and contention in regards to her fashion sense. Overall, she is praised for wearing and promoting American designs, including newcomers to the industry.[48] While some comment on Michelle Obama's confidence in expressing herself, others note her ability to resonate with so many American women: "What's so powerful about Michelle Obama is we all see ourselves in her," said red-carpet and magazine stylist Mary Alice Stephenson" as reported in *The Associated Press.*[49] Moreover, Michelle Obama is characterized by the press as capable of trend setting. From her off the rack appearance on *The View*, which caused the Donna Ricco $148 sundress to sell out, an article for *The Associated press*

sums it up: “Undoubtedly, fashion will change,” says Rochelle Behrens, a designer and also a former intern in the Bush White House.”[50] Yet, in some ways Obama is still at odds with the underlying assumptions of these trends. As Chris Lehane, a former Gore campaign spokesperson notes, the Obama campaign had often been unsure about Michelle’s appeal, in part due to the “novelty of a black woman’s auditioning for the role of first lady.”[51] Commenting on the onslaught of unsolicited advice Michelle has received about her ongoing performance as first lady potential, Lehane underlines his point: that Michelle will be measured against a “hard-to-meet standard” of the [white] women who have come before her.[52]

Representing American Womanhood

Beyond fashion, the press also articulates the expectation that first ladies must offer a clear understanding of how they will represent American women, specifically through the causes they advocate for. The news coverage leading up to the 2008 election and soon after suggests that although the role is ill defined, the women who fill it cannot be. As a journalist for the *Washington Post* notes: “As the next first lady, she will have no prescribed duties and responsibilities. Instead, she will step into the role of national symbol. She can support a cause and address certain issues.”[53] Despite the seemingly “open” parameters of the job, the *Post* quickly follows with examples, noting: “Lady Bird Johnson presaged the environmental movement with her national focus on highway beautification. “Just Say No" became the rallying cry for Nancy Reagan's efforts to prevent substance abuse. And Laura Bush has undertaken a variety of causes, including literacy, education, and women's health and wellness.”[54] The growing connection

between a first lady's ceremonial advocacy and civic responsibility is longstanding. Rooted in nineteenth century gender ideology of what it means to be "a woman" the symbolic gesture of "taking on a cause" is thoroughly gendered, raced, and classed. [55] Specifically, gender ideologies asserted that women risked their chastity if they were to exit the realm of the domestic, but in the home they had influence over matters of religion, morality, and children. Later, women took these "private" concerns public, caring for the health and hygiene of the nation. This work bound together understandings of womanhood and citizenship. It is why the work of first ladies, even today, remains carefully feminine and why Anderson argues first ladies "function as "symbols" of traditional *white* middle- to upper-class femininity in America."[56]

In 2008 Michelle Obama presented a paradox when it came to finding a "signature issue." Having held a high powered career while raising two young daughters, she had the support of many who believed it was time to shift the first lady role to respect the working mother lifestyle.[57] Her position also created buzz about the constraints of the role, and its representation of American women. As *TheNew York Times* reported "Michelle would be only the second working mother to become a first lady, and there's not all that much about Hillary's experience that offers much comfort." The *Times* also commented on the widespread debate about Michelle's take on the first lady role noting: "The unsolicited advice reflects the passionate debate stirring among working mothers here and abroad as they watch Mrs. Obama finalize her transition from hospital executive to self-proclaimed mom-in-chief in the White House."[58] As Michelle Obama continued to offer public support for work-family balance, particularly with

military families, many women became divided on whether she would be "a pioneer or a dispiriting symbol of the limitations of modern working motherhood."[59] These critiques, revealed longstanding assumptions about the type of "work" appropriate for the first lady, as well as understandings of motherhood. Although the "modern woman" may have supported a symbol of working motherhood, in many ways the classed and racial history of the role does not. In fact, it challenges the very division the role is founded on.

The Tradition of Transitions

Finally, in forecasting the role of first lady, the press emphasizes the importance of following tradition when it comes to the transitions that occur after the election and leading up to Inauguration. In the 2008, all three media outlets quoted outgoing first lady Laura Bush referencing these ceremonial responsibilities: "'I think there's a great tradition of transition in the United States.'"[60] Specifically, an analysis of the press coverage identified three particular "traditions." First, the meeting of the predecessor. Shortly after the election, the outgoing first lady is expected to make contact with her successor and invite her for a tour. According to *The Washington Post*, the transitional tradition of the "house tour" began back in 1908, with Edith Roosevelt invited incoming First Lady Nellie Taft for a tour.[61] Second, the Inaugural Day White House meeting prior to the ceremony. Third, the first lady's responsibility to hold the Lincoln Bible during the ceremony. As journalist for *TheWashington Post* noted "The first first lady to stand at the center of the action and hold the [Lincoln] Bible was Lady Bird Johnson in 1965. She did so at her loving husband's behest, wearing a brilliant red cloak in an ocean of black. A modern tradition was born."[62] Finally, the evening of Inauguration brings

anticipation for the Inaugural gown reveal. The first lady's gown in particular gained popularity as a symbol of tradition when Helen Taft began the practice of donating to the Smithsonian for display.[63] These ceremonial activities become reified as civic duty through the press's articulation of their history, as well as their symbolic importance to the peaceful transition of power. The first lady's ceremonial presence during this time, and the conflation of this presence with more clearly defined civic duties can be traced to the newly forming American government. The U.S. was unique in their version of representative government in that the same person (the president) is asked to be both be head of state for ceremonies and head of government role in legislation. In considering the use of "lady" in "First Lady" or "Lady Washington," Edith Mayo and Denise Meringolo point out that "lady" specifically connotes upper class "respectability" and "a certain kind of demeanor."[64] Finding the need for assistance in the ceremonial aspects of the nation, the first lady has been charged by custom as the "keeper of customs."[65] Meant to signify a truly *peaceful* transition, first ladies are obliged to engage as peaceful actors in rituals leading up to Inauguration day.[66]

In 2008, both Laura Bush and Michelle Obama honored the tradition of transitions.[67] A writer for the *Post* pointed out the historic tradition, noting: "Obama's meeting with Bush was the latest in a 100-year tradition that has produced symbolic moments as political pasts met political futures." Similarly, on Inauguration day, *The New York Times* projected, "If the past is any guide, Tuesday's move will begin about 10:45 a.m., right after the Bushes, who will have hosted the Obamas for the traditional Inauguration Day coffee, leave for the swearing-in at the Capitol."[68] Though several

journalists questioned if the tradition would "hold," the very act of reporting on such traditions as prominent responsibilities simultaneously reifies them. Similarly, the *Times* goes on to point out that "On Tuesday, tradition calls for Michelle Obama to hold the Bible. It will be the one from Lincoln's first inauguration in 1861." And of course, Michelle Obama did not disappoint the public with her Inaugural ball gown. As one fashion writer for the *Times* reported "It was an amazing day for Mrs. Obama . . . For Tuesday night's round of balls, she chose a fluffy, many-layered gown by a 26-year-old designer named Jason Wu."[69]

Each of these symbolic civic acts—interest in fashion, representation of American women through advocacy, as well as participation in the tradition of transitions—serves as criteria by which first ladies potentials were judged in the 2008 election. Stemming from ceremonial duties of the first lady role, they have become articulated as symbolic civic duties required of first lady potentials, thus constituting the guidelines by which the role is judged as the "symbolic citizen." However, as this analysis has demonstrated, we cannot think of these "criteria" as gendered alone. Given the nature and history of the first ladyship, these civic symbolic acts are also encircled by assumptions of race and class. These markers are clearly punctuated in the anxiety felt about Michelle Obama's auditioning for the first lady, throughout the 2008 press coverage. As such, I argue that using the narrative of a "journey" the press transforms Obama's black body to fit a white role.

The Transformation of Michelle Obama

Michelle Obama was no "ordinary" woman auditioning for the role of first lady. As Chris Lehane, an adviser for the Gore campaign noted in *The New York Times*, the novelty of a black woman auditioning for the first lady position posed some uncertainty for the Obama campaign, especially after early missteps.[70] Indeed, questions and comments about race seemed to plague Michelle Obama even more than her husband, who was actually running for public office. Through my exploration of three mainstream press outlets, I argue the press evoked a narrative of transformation as way to manage the possibility of a black first lady. Given the inherent ties of the first lady role to [white, middle class] womanhood, this analysis illuminates the subtle shifts in press coverage and the framing mechanisms by which Michelle Obama, a black woman, from modest beginnings, came to embody the tenants of [white] womanhood necessary to be seen as the next first lady. In essence, this section demonstrates the often invisible ways that first ladies are expected to reify characteristics of the role that are tied to white privilege/womanhood.

Although Michelle Obama began the campaign strong, she was soon plagued by issues of raced and classed criticism from the press. Throughout the early campaigning season in the fall of 2007 it seemed Michelle Obama could do no wrong. But then, as *The New York Times* reported: "came some rhetorical stumbles." For example, "In Madison, Wis., in February, she told voters that hope was sweeping America, adding, 'For the first time in my adult lifetime, I am really proud of my country.' Cable news programs replayed those 15 words in an endless loop of outrage."[71] Her missteps were

framed in “stark contrast” to how she started the season, as if she had somehow revealed her truer self—causing a flurry of raced and classed criticisms.[72] Some [conservative] columnists pointed towards “undigested racial anger.”[73] Fox News called her “‘Obama's baby mama,'” a derogatory term for an unwed mother,” while others claimed she was “influenced by black separatism.”[74] Despite several journalists noting that Barack Obama often came across as an almost “post-racial” candidate, several were quick to point out that Michelle’s identity was “less mutable,” as the decedents of slaves and a “and a product of Chicago's historically black South Side.”[75] Come mid-summer of 2008, Michelle was once again in the spotlight, this time for her and Obama’s now iconic “fist bump.”[76] Though several journalists came to her defense, it nevertheless became a heated issue in the mainstream media, especially after being mischaracterized as a symbol of “Black power” on the cover of *The New Yorker*.[77] Throughout the summer several journalists contested the racialized take on Michelle Obama’s actions, while also pointing to the banality of black women being viewed “through a different lens” than their white counterparts, “who are portrayed as kinder, gentler souls…”[78] However, by the end of summer Michelle would undergo further transformation in the news narrative.

Leading up to the Democratic National Convention in August of 2008, a more positive and perhaps even choreographed, transformation, occurred. After an appearance on the popular morning television show *The View,* Michelle’s presence and image began to “soften,” as noted by *The New York Times.*[79] In August *The Associated Press* reported “In recent weeks, Michelle Obama has worked to soften her image, talking

about raising two daughters in an interview in Ebony magazine and making a June appearance at an Ohio nursing home. Barack Obama's half-sister, Maya Soetoro-Ng, and Michelle Obama's older brother, Craig Robinson, also will have roles in the convention."[80] Indeed, this softening came full circle at the DNC.

On August 25 at the Pepsi Center in Denver Colorado "The audience roared with delight. And many clapped, too, when she said: ''I also come here as a mother; that is my primary title, mom in chief. My girls are the first thing I think about when I wake up in the morning and the last thing I think about when I go to bed. When people ask me how I'm doing, I say, 'I'm only as good as my most sad child.'"[81] A writer for the *Post* noted: "Whether through film or speech or testimonial, the effort on Monday night was to frame Michelle in a way that would help Americans see her as the next first lady."[82] The Obama campaign and commentators used the DNC especially as a way to reboot her personality—to refute all that has come before and defend all that she will be after. 'The point was really to introduce Michelle to the public for the first time and let them see that she is very different from the caricatures displayed in the news,' said Ogletree, an adviser who has spoken with her periodically throughout the campaign. 'Michelle is not a politician. She is a mother and a wife and a working woman and a community organizer.'"[83] In the wake of her DNC speech a writer for *The Associated Press* reported Michelle also began to talk more about the "Challenges women face in balancing their families and jobs" and that they "should be highlighted in government policies."[84] She also started speaking more pointedly about her support for military wives and families, in particular.

After the DNC, Michelle Obama saw praise from the press and public. Her persona was transformed by the mainstream press, her approval rating sealed, with a public declaration of her motherhood. Indeed, as a black woman, it was not enough to simply "be" a mother—she had to publicly "declare" her status and commitment to it—something white women/first lady's rarely encounter. Ultimately her "softened" image was a welcome relief for most. Yet it also solidified the unshakable roots of the first ladyship as grounded in antiquated notions of race, gender, and class. Michelle Obama's public performance of motherhood and the media's coverage of it had proven she was able to practice "impression management"—but it also affirmed the undeniable link between motherhood/true womanhood and the symbolic performance of the first lady."[85]

Of course, for the black community, Michelle's "mom in chief" declaration also stood out as significant, but for vastly different reasons. As a black woman in America, Michelle's motherhood was not like her white first lady potential counterparts. Black mothers are often caricatured as bad mothers, absent mothers or, historically seen as mother figures to others (white children) but not their own kids. In general, Michelle Obama's public commitment to her daughters ushered in positive feedback from the black community.[86] For the press, though, *choosing* to be mom in chief allowed Michelle Obama to successfully assimilate into white-post-feminist culture that now surrounds mainstream discussions of the first lady role, including issues of "choice," and blatant disregard for Michelle's position to be a different kind of role model to mothers of color.

After the election of Barack Obama in November of 2008, the press's narrative on Michelle Obama shifted once again, back to a discussion of her fitness for the role. [White] feminists were now able to return their critique of Michelle's fitness for the role, now focused on "how far" she would take the role, what boundaries she would or would not push, and whether or not her quest to be "mom first" would become an issue. In December, *The New York Times* ran an article featuring an interview with first lady scholar Myra Gutin: "In January, Mrs. Obama, 44, will become the second first lady in history to have had an active career until shortly before entering the White House. She is only the third to hold a graduate degree, in her case, a law degree from Harvard, Ms. Gutin said." Several articles soon re-focused their coverage to on Michelle Obama's "choice" to give up her career, and potentially, being *too* conservative of a modern first lady. In November, *The New York Times* reported "In the online magazine Salon, Rebecca Traister bemoaned the 'momification of Michelle Obama,'' criticizing the news media's focus on Mrs. Obama's search for schools for her two young daughters, her fashion sense and her pledge that her No. 1 job is 'to be Mom.' 'Why is there so little curiosity about how Michelle will adjust to the loss of her own private, very successful, very high-profile and very independent identity?' Ms. Traister asked."[87] Traister's comment and others like re-defined Michelle Obama's motherhood in a post-feminist narrative of "choice."[88]

In this iteration of Michelle Obama's media persona, race is only mentioned in the context of breaking racial barriers.[89] In line with post-feminist culture, Michelle is reported as a "self-described" mom-in-chief. For example, an article in *The Associated*

Press noted: “The work/family cause now has ardent champions in President-elect Barack Obama and self-described mom-in-chief Michelle Obama, who says it will be among her top priorities.”[90] Similarly a journalist for *The New York Times* commented “Mrs. Obama has focused publicly in recent months on her self-described role of "mom in chief," settling her daughters at Sidwell Friends School and persuading her mother to move into the White House.” And so while many people have cheered Mr. Obama for breaking racial barriers, some argue that his wife remains bound by a traditional role that seems too small and too ill-fitting for a thoughtful, Ivy League-educated executive.”[91] Some subtle, and others not so much, these comments and others like it connote a woman who has the privilege (class) to choose her own labels, her own future.[92] This final transformation promotes a post-racial and post-feminist identity for the Obamas, but in doing do also successfully positions Michelle in the historically [white] role of first lady. So instead of grappling with her “blackness,” as an obstacle for the job, she is now welcomed into the post-feminist double binds befitting of middle class white women in the political sphere.

Conclusion

During the summer of 2016, just as the primary season for the upcoming election was nearing its end, *NPR* published an article titled “*From Reluctant Political Spouse to Pop Culture Icon*.” Inside, the author discusses Michelle’s Obama’s “full circle” success as a national figure—from a rough start on the 2008 campaign trail, to a soon-to-be three-time DNC darling. The author notes “In eight years Michelle Obama has gone from obscurity to becoming one of the country’s most popular Democrats.”[93] Indeed,

Michelle Obama has remained largely popular with the press and public alike during Obama's two terms in office and afterward; yet as the *NPR* title notes, Michelle Obama was not always so admired.

This chapter sought to understand significant changes in the press coverage of Michelle Obama as a first lady potential during the 2008 campaign. Although in hindsight, appears well documented (both in the press and scholarly realm) that race and class were indeed factors in judging Michelle Obama from the start of her time in the limelight, this analysis sought to go beyond. In prioritizing the civic symbolic acts tied to the institutional role of First Lady, this essay illustrates not only that the role of First Lady is an embodiment of white womanhood and white citizenship, but also identified the specific mechanisms by which the First Lady's emblematic position—as a symbolic citizen—reifies the characteristics of the role that are so closely linked to that white privilege/womanhood.

By illustrating how Michelle Obama was transformed into a "Symbolic Citizen," this chapter focused on what it means for the first lady role to be largely constructed and maintained by the press during election seasons. As a Symbolic Citizen, first lady potentials are asked to participate in particular symbolic civic actions. In the 2008 election coverage, these civic actions coalesced around interest in fashion, representation of women through advocacy, as well as traditions associated with the transitioning of office. Although these actions may at first glance appeared only gendered, this analysis has established the ways they are also linked to race and class in the previously all-white institution of the first ladyship.

During my investigation of three popular press outlets and their ongoing transformation of Michelle Obama throughout the 2008 election season, from cold, angry, black, woman into palatable, stylish, mom-in-chief, I have argued that the simultaneous positioning of her as an emblem of white womanhood is tied to the understanding that potential first ladies are expected to embody the norms of gender, and class, associated with white womanhood as part of their civic obligation to the nation-state. Michelle Obama's own participation in her "transformation" to fashionista and working mother, showcase how markers of whiteness (including class and privilege) are masked in a successful projection of the first lady role by a black woman.

Indeed, although NRP's article from 2016 points to Michelle Obama's inherent "success" as the first African American First Lady, it also speaks to the existence and necessity of her 2008 transformation. This is not to argue that Michelle Obama has not served as a tremendous role model of black womanhood, but rather to underscore the challenges a woman of color faces in taking on the first lady institution. As with most institutional roles, I can assume that only time and continued diversity will bring about meaningful evolution, and in some ways it will always be tethered by the qualities of the role's liberal [white] founding.

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[1] Lisa M. Burns, *First ladies and the fourth estate: Press framing of presidential wives*. Northern Illinois University Press, 2008, p. 7.
[2] Maureen Dowd, "Final Mincing Up Michelle," *The New York Times,* Nov. 5, 2008.
[3] See Patrick Healy, "New To Campaigning, but No Longer a Novice," *The New York Times,* (Oct. 28, 2008).
[4] Tom Leonard, "Michelle Obama: American's next first lady." *The Telegraph,* (Nov. 5, 2008).
[5] Karen Grigsby Gates, "Is Michelle Obama and Asset or Liability?" *NPR,* (Mar 6, 2008).
[6] Nancy Gibbs and Jay Newton Small, "The War Over Michelle Obama," *Time Magazine,* (Mar 4, 2012).

[7] Dahleen Glanton, "Michelle Obama's goal: Define herself," *The Chicago Tribune,* (Aug 25, 2008).
[8] See for example: Jodi Kantor, "A family expected to balance state dinners with sleepovers," *The New York Times,* (Nov 6, 2008); Rachel Swarns, "From Home and Away, advice for a First Lady," *The New York Times,* (Nov 24, 2008); Richard Leiby, "A Signature with the First Lady's Hand in it," *The Washington Post,* (Jan 30, 2009).
[9] See for example on intersectional approaches Karma Chávez and Cindy Griffen Chavez eds. *Standing in the intersection: Feminist voices, feminist practices in communication studies*. Suny Press, 2012.
[10] Although "press framing" or identifying prevalent frames used in media coverage are popular ways to examine print media (sources), this study approaches the media coverage of Michelle Obama through a more holistic, rhetorically oriented, thematic analysis. It will focus on mainstream, print, news coverage of Michelle Obama during the 2008 election season and beyond. In particular, it will draw on print news from three sources—the *New York Times, The Washington Post,* and *The Associated Press.* This selection of sources was chosen for its ability to reach a wide range of consumers across the nation in both national and local outlets. Using the search engine "Lexus Nexus," I filtered news results by using the time frame June 7, 2008- January 31, 2009. Specifically, I am interested in press coverage of Michelle Obama as a serious candidate for *potential* first lady, thus I have limited my news coverage to begin after Hillary Clinton had conceded in the primaries. My coverage ends 10 days after the Inauguration of Barak Obama, so to capture additional insight between pre/post inaugural reports about Michelle Obama, should they provide fruitful. Initial terms included "Michelle AND Obama." This search yielded over 1000 articles. As the primary scope of this chapter is focused on how the press projects a first lady role/candidate a secondary search within available results was conducted using the key words "first [and] lady." This yielded 381 articles. The data was further cleaned throughout the reading process, and I excluded those articles with only tangential mentions or no mention of Michelle Obama.
[11] Shawn Parry-Giles Diane M. Blair. "The rise of the rhetorical first lady: Politics, gender ideology, and women's voice, 1789-2002." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 5, no. 4 (2002): 565-599.
[12] Molly J. Wertheimer, "Editor's Introduction," in *Leading Ladies of the White House: Communication strategies of notable twentieth-century first ladies* (Lanham: Rowmand & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2005) 1-15
[13] Robert P. Watson. *First Ladies of the United States: A Biographical Dictionary*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001.
[14] Burns, *First ladies and the fourth estate*, 2008.
[15] Edith Mayo. *The Smithsonian Book of the First Ladies: Their Lives, Times, and Issues*. Macmillan, 1996, p. 239.
[16] Burns, *First ladies and the fourth estate*, 2008, p. 4.
[17] Burns, *First ladies and the fourth estate*, 2008
[18] Ibid.
[19] Beasley, Maurine H. *First ladies and the press: The unfinished partnership of the media age*. Northwestern University Press, 2005.
[20] Burns, *First ladies and the fourth estate*, 2008
[21] Wertheimer, "Editor's Introduction," 2005).
[22] Burns, *First ladies and the fourth estate*, 2008, p. 6.
[23] Burns, *First ladies and the fourth estate*, 2008
[24] Burns, *First ladies and the fourth estate*, 2008, p. 6.
[25] Gutin, Myra G. The president's partner: The first lady in the twentieth century. Praeger Pub Text, 1989, p. 176.
Harvard
[26] Burns, *First ladies and the fourth estate*, 2008
[27] Winfield in Robert P. Watson, "First Lady Michelle Obama." *The Obama Presidency: A Preliminary Assessment* (2012): 379-397.

[28] Burns goes on to detail the various frames the press uses to talk about the first lady, including those relying on gender norms, celebrity status, and past icons. Burns, *First ladies and the fourth estate*, 2008, p. 7.
[29] Burns, *First ladies and the fourth estate*, 2008, p. 12.
[30] Burns, *First ladies and the fourth estate*, 2008
[31] Burns, *First ladies and the fourth estate*, 2008, p. 8.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Burns, *First ladies and the fourth estate*, 2008
[34] Kathleen Hall Jameson. *Beyond the double bind: Women and leadership*. Oxford University Press on Demand, 1995.
[35] See for example, Karrin Vasby Anderson, "The first lady: A site of American womanhood," in *Inventing a voice: The rhetoric of American first ladies of the twentieth century,* ed. M. J. Wertheimer (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2004), 17-30; Burns, *First ladies and the fourth estate*, 2008; Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "The Rhetorical Presidency," in *Beyond the Rhetorical Presidency,* ed. M. J. Medhurst (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996): 179-195.
[36] Burns, *First ladies and the fourth estate*, 2008, p. 9.
[37] Tiffany J. Shoop, "From professionals to potential First Ladies: How newspapers told the stories of Cindy McCain and Michelle Obama." Sex roles 63, no. 11-12 (2010): 807-819.
[38] Jonathan Knuckey and Kim Myunghee. "Evaluations of Michelle Obama as First Lady: The Role of Racial Resentment." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2016), p. 369.
[39] Burns, *First ladies and the fourth estate*, 2008
[40] See for example Burns, *First ladies and the fourth estate*, 2008; Anderson, *The First Lady,* 2004
[41] Burns, *First ladies and the fourth estate*, 2008; Beasley, *First Ladies and the Press,* 2005; Parry-Giles and Blair, *Rise of the rhetorical first lady,* 2002.
[42] See also Guy Trebay, "U.S. Fashion's One-Woman Bailout?" *The New York Times,* (Jan. 8, 2009); Robin Givhan, "Gown and Country; The Next Generation of American Designers Fashion New Looks for a New First Lady," *The Washington Post,* (Dec. 21, 2008).
[43] Robin Givhan, "First Ladies and the Fabric of the Nation," *The Washington Post,* (Sep. 7, 2008).
[44] Givhan, "Gown and Country," 2008
[45] Trebay, "U.S. Fashion's One-Woman Bailout?" 2009; see also Ellen Byron, "Palin's style sparks buying frenzy," *The Associated Press* (Sep. 12, 2008); Givhan, "First Ladies and the Fabric of the Nation," 2008.
[46] See also Eric Wilson, "The Spotlight Finds Jason Wu," *The New York Times,* (Jan. 25, 2009); Trebay, "U.S. Fashion's One-Woman Bailout?" 2009; Givhan, "First Ladies and the Fabric of the Nation," 2008.
[47] Jennifer, Keohane, "The Most Important Dress in the Country": The Rhetoric of Glamour in the Smithsonian's "The First Ladies." Women's Studies in Communication 40, no. 3 (2017): 270-288.
[48] See also Robin Givhan, "The First Lady as Fashion Leader," *The Washington Post,* (Jan. 18, 2009); Cathy Horyn, "The First Lady, in Ivory and Vivid Yellow, Tells a Story with Fashion," *The New York Times,* (Jan. 21, 2009); Teri Agins, "Over-40 finds a muse in Mrs. Obama," *The Wall Street Journal,* (Dec. 8, 2008).
[49] Samantha Critchell, "Michelle Obama chooses white ball gown," *The Associated Press,* (Jan. 21, 2009).
[50] Jocelyn Noveck, "A young family, a new style for the White House," *The Associated Press,* (Nov. 7, 2008).
[51] See Patrick Healy, "New To Campaigning, but No Longer a Novice," *The New York Times,* (Oct. 28, 2008).
[52] Ibid.
[53] "A Role That Nicely Suits the Next First Lady," *The Washington Post,* (Nov. 9, 2008).

[54] Indeed, first ladies are expected to declare what issue they will stamp with their unique influence. See for reference Jocelyn Noveck, "Great expectations await the nation's next first lady," *The Associated Press,* (Nov. 21, 2008).
[55] Margaret M Quinlan, Benjamin R. Bates, and Jennifer B. Webb. "Michelle Obama 'got back': (Re) defining (counter) stereotypes of Black females." Women & Language 35, no. 1 (2012): 119-126.
[56] Anderson, *The First Lady,* 2004, p. 18, emphasis added
[57] See Swarns, "From Home and Away," 2008
[58] Ibid.
[59] See Gail Collins, "The Torch Passes. Really." *The New York Times,* (Aug. 28, 2008).
[60] See Marian Burros, "For First Lady, White House Nostalgia," *The New York Times,* (Dec. 4, 2008); Jura Koncius, "First Lady's Holiday: Red, White and Just a Touch of Blue," *The Washington Post,* (Dec. 4, 2008); Donna Cassata, "It looks a lot like Christmas past at White House, *The Associated Press,* (Dec. 3, 2008).
[61] See for more details Richard Leiby and Valerie Strauss, "The Future First Lady, Finding Her Home in History," *The Washington Post,* (Nov. 11, 2008).
[62] Dan Zak, "In the Beginning; The Oath Is a President's First Act, But Everyone's Not on the Same Page," *The Washington Post,* (Jan. 18, 2009).
[63] The first Inaugural Ball was held in 1809 for James Madison, but they have come and gone throughout the last three centuries based on issues pertaining to budget, war time, and depression, see for more details: Alicia Ault, "When Was the First Inaugural Ball?" *Smithsonian.com,* (Jan. 19, 2017). Retrieved from https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/when-was-first-inaugural-ball-180961863/
[64] Edith P. Mayo and Denise D. Meringolo, "First Ladies: Political Image and Public Portrait." *Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution* (1994), p. 8.
[65] Watson, *First Ladies of the United States: A Biographical Dictionary*, 2001.
[66] Cole Myers, "6 Presidential Inauguration Traditions and What They Mean," *Newsmax,* (Jan. 18, 2017). Retrieved from http://www.newsmax.com/TheWire/presidential-inauguration-traditions/2017/01/19/id/769398/
[67] Jodi Kantor "A family expected to balance state dinners with sleepovers," *2*008.
[68] Megan K. Scott, "Your at-home guide to the Inauguration," *The Associated Press,* (Jan. 15, 2009): *The Associated Press* echoed the sentiment noting: "On Inauguration Day, if tradition holds, the Obamas will visit the White House in the morning before Bush and Obama ride to Capitol Hill together for the swearing-in ceremony."
[69] Horyn, "The First Lady, in Ivory and Vivid Yellow, Tells a Story with Fashion," 2009.
[70] See for example Healy, "New To Campaigning, but No Longer a Novice," 2008.
[71] Michael Powell and Jodi Kantor, "After Attacks, Michelle Obama Looks for a New Introduction," *The New York Times,* (Jun. 18, 2008).
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.
[76] See for more details, Mike Allen, "Obama slams New Yorker portrayal," *Politico,* (Jul. 13, 2012), Retrieved from http://www.politico.com/story/2008/07/obama-slams-new-yorker-portrayal-011719
[77] See also Sophia A. Nelson, "Black. Female. Accomplished. Attacked." *The Washington Post,* (Jul. 20, 2008).
[78] Ibid.
[79] Powell and Kantor, "After Attacks, Michelle Obama Looks for a New Introduction," 2008.
[80] The Associated Press, "Speakers at the Democratic convention on Monday," *The Associated Press,* (Aug. 22, 2008).
[81] Healy, "New To Campaigning, but No Longer a Novice," 2008.

[82] Kevin Merida, "A defining Moment; In Denver, Michelle Obama Takes a Deep Break and Steps Up to the Podium and Her Supporting Role," *The Washington Post,* (Aug. 26, 2008).
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ann Sanner, "Michelle Obama describes duty as mother-in-chief," *The Associated Press,* (Aug. 4, 2008).
[85] DeNeen L. Brown and Richard Leiby, "The Very Image of Affirmation; In Michelle Obama, Black Women See a Familiar Grace & Strength Writ Large," *The Washington Post,* (Nov. 21, 2008).
[86] Nelson, "Black. Female. Accomplished. Attacked," 2008.
[87] Swarns, "From Home and Away," 2008.
[88] See for example Sarah Projansky, *Mass magazine cover girls: Some reflections on postfeminist girls and postfeminism's daughters*, 2007.
[89] In other words, the first black president and first lady.
[90] See for example Darlene Superville, "Next first lady no 'plastic talking head'," *The Associated Press,* (Jan. 14, 2009).
[91] Swarns, "From Home and Away," 2008.
[92] See for example Noveck, "Great expectations await the nation's next first lady,"2008.
[93] Grigsby Gates, "Is Michelle Obama and Asset or Liability?" 2008.

3. LADY BIRD JOHNSON'S "SOUTHERN TOUR": THE LADY BIRD SPECIAL AS A PERFORMANCE OF REGIONAL CITIZENSHIP

1960s America was an era of both change and stasis; even as understandings of race and gender were upended, appeals were simultaneously being made to uphold traditional norms. These conditions produced a moment of uncertainty within the Johnson Administration. As President Johnson passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, effectively banning poll taxes, support from the Southern Democrats began to wane.[1] Heading into September 1964 Gallup Polls gave Johnson a 69 to 31 percent lead over Republican nominee Barry Goldwater. The South could have easily been "given" to Republicans and Johnson would have still won by a landslide, taking over 400 electoral votes of the 270 needed to win.[2] However, Goldwater's campaign marked an important rise of the new Republican conservative, an ideology that would reshape American politics into the 1980s and 1990s.[3] Holding the South's support was a crucial part of President Johnson's vision for "The Great Society," which included economic and social growth across the nation. Johnson hoped to liberate the South from isolation—a task started by Roosevelt's New Deal. Unfortunately, Lyndon Johnson's advisors considered it largely a waste of time, perhaps even dangerous, to campaign in the region, given the amount of disagreement over the Civil Rights Act. Lady Bird Johnson, however, disagreed and would not allow the votes and the territory to be yielded.[4]

Born and raised in the Deep South Lady Bird refused to allow her husband and the Democratic Party to lose ties with the region. She understood the shock felt by

southerners who believed a distant government, through the Civil Rights Act, was changing their way of life. The first lady wanted to ease their anger by demonstrating that ending segregation and keeping her Democratic husband in office would ultimately enable the South to improve economically.[5] On October 6, 1964, Lady Bird made history as she boarded a train headed south from Washington D.C. In this unprecedented act, as the first solo campaign conducted by a first lady, she embraced the opportunity to advocate on behalf of her husband's re-election and dedication to Civil Rights in a region she long called home. At the end of a four-day journey, Lady Bird had covered 1,628 miles over eight states, given 47 speeches, and addressed close to 500,000 rural southerners with a message of education, southern progress, and the potential to uphold prosperity.[6] By garnering her southern roots, she strategically forged a viable connection between voters and the president. As Lady Bird remarked in several of her speeches, she was making "a journey of the heart" that would help foster understanding between herself, her husband's presidency, and the southern United States.

We can read Lady Bird's performance of the first lady role as fundamentally expansive. A quick examination of her whistle stop tour, "Women Do-ers" luncheons, and "Phone-a-Friend" program, showcase how she mobilized women for a range of causes, taking advantage of changing cultural and contextual elements to do so.[7] Certainly, the early 1960s represented the beginning of many societal shifts. As Howard Brick notes, "Intellectuals and activists then approached the coming decade of the 1960s as a chance to realize far reaching goals of social progress."[8] As suburban women continued to question their exclusive position in the home, the sexual revolution gained

momentum, and conversations of equal work for equal pay contributed toward trends of "sex egalitarianism."[9] When we consider Lady Bird's tenure as first lady within this context, it is clear she shifted the boundaries of civic activity not only for the role, but for women more generally.[10]

Yet the argument I want to advance is not one based solely in cultural conditions, gender politics, or even the unofficial power associated with the first lady role. Instead, I want to think about the larger possibilities surrounding how the first lady was able to position herself as a regional citizen, a rhetorical resource that allowed her to enter, engage, and effect change in the South. Drawing on the recent work in rhetorical studies to resuscitate the importance of physical space and region, I explore how Lady Bird's rhetorical performance expands our definition contextual elements associated with citizenship and regional belonging. In doing so, I suggest Lady Bird's campaign as a civic performance is fundamentally tied to a shared regional understanding of place and culture.

Specifically, in this chapter I argue that Lady Bird's exigence for her unprecedented trip, the curated Southern aura surrounding her tour, as well as her rhetorical response to rural southerners, mimics regional considerations of gender, womanhood, and civic duty that ultimately allow Lady Bird Johnson to pass through the South, despite tensions between the region and the nation-state. The first lady's embodiment of regional citizenship expands how the first lady's civic acts are called forth from particular *places* and increases our perception of how regional belonging can be utilized as a rhetorical resource. This essay attends to the "performative dimensions

of space" that allow for more fluid understandings of citizenship and belonging tied to performances of regionality.[11]

To make this argument, I will first assess how the first lady has been utilizing rhetorical action to engage with the public, how these acts are fundamentally related to citizenship. After, I explore the literature on critical regionalism, regional rhetoric, as well as the importance of understanding the South as a distinctive regional space. Finally, my analysis of Lady Bird's whistle stop tour highlights her unique use of regionality in crafting a performance that expanded not only her ability to participate as a citizen, but also eased tensions in civic identity amongst citizens of the South and the rest of the president.

The First Lady as a Rhetorical Citizen

Over a decade ago, Robert Asen re-oriented the study of citizenship within rhetorical studies with his "discourse theory." Premised on the idea of asking "how" instead of "what," Asen posited that citizenship is a process of activities instead of any one particular act.[12] More recently, Christian Kock and Lisa Villadsen reaffirmed that to understand citizenship as rhetorical is to accept the premise that citizens gain access to and influence public and civic life "through symbolic action."[13] The utility of taking a rhetorical perspective is that it allows us to consider the multitude of approaches individual can take to engaging and participating in civic life. As Kock and Villadsen note, a rhetorical approach to citizenship assumes that discourse among citizens is more fundamental to what it means to be a citizen than legal rights or privileges.[14]

This perspective is especially useful in considering how women, minorities, and others excluded by more traditional markers of citizenship continue to engage, expand, and make changes to the structure of public life. For example, several studies have explored how women, in particular, have challenged the traditional status quo of citizenship status through discursive acts, such as petitioning, by enacting militant citizenship as both a performance and a challenge to gendered national identity, as well as appropriated public rituals, including voting.[15] As Isaac West argues, laws must be performed and enacted to maintain force, but in doing so also allow for the possibility of moments that weaken, extend, or challenge exclusionary elements.[16]

As a rhetorical figure the first lady has been posing her own challenges to exclusionary elements of civic life over the last three centuries. Shawn Parry-Giles and Diane Blair trace the "rise" of the rhetorical first lady from 1789-2002. In doing so, they highlight how the first lady role both empowers and restricts performance of political contributions.[17] From social politicking, to benevolent volunteering, until the mid-twentieth century when first ladies were routinely asked and expected to take the podium, their study outlines how the first lady has used rhetoric to engage in civic life, achieving administrative and personal goals alike. Although the first lady's civic actions have been constrained by ties to the republican motherhood, many have entered the public sphere in overtly political ways.[18] In particular, first ladies have relied on context and changing public vocabularies to expand their rhetorical role. Eleanor Roosevelt's speech to the 1940 Democratic National Committee delegates, Roselynn Carter's 1977 foreign policy trip to Latin America on behalf of her husband, and Laura Bush's use of

maternal feminism to advocate for Afghan women are examples how first ladies have utilized the cultural atmosphere to promote or undertake particular acts.[19] The continued public and political presence of the rhetorical first lady underscores the importance of understanding her contributions to the nation state and civic life as essentially rhetorical in nature.

Central to all of these examples, is the fundamentally contextual nature of citizenship. In other words, citizenship and civic acts are situational, grounded in particulars. However, David Zarefsky also draws our attention to the *larger* contexts in which citizenship is enacted, arguing that "Citizenship is the enactment of the individual's relationship to the polity, whether it is local, state or regional, national, or global."[20] Indeed, citizen status, civic performances, and challenges to them, are defined and enacted against a multitude of geographical and contextual backdrops, and Lady Bird's whistle stop tour, in particular, reveals the importance of attending to regional contexts. The potential for doing so is reflected in recent efforts to recognize the geographical dimension of texts and performance.

Imagining the Regional Citizen

In the early 1980s architect Alexander Tzonis and historian Liane Lefaivre outlined a version of "critical regionalism" to serve as a viable, critical, paradigm concerned with place and region as essential to designing particular spaces. Far from kitschy nationalism or a nostalgic yearning for local traditions, their regard for common place and local environment attempted to infuse design with regional elements and reject universal building.[21] Furthering their work, architectural theorist Kenneth Frampton

launched the critical regionalist movement in the 1980s, suggesting that architecture should be built in a dialectical relationship to local terrain. He called for a movement that helped individuals realize a "political consciousness through local spaces."[22] Frampton hoped in doing so communities would resist universalized architecture that misses opportunities for experience and reflection within a particular region.

More recently, in 2012 a small group of rhetorical scholars revisited the concept of regionalism as defined by Tzonis, Lefairvre, and Frampton.[23] Although the concept as long been important to studies in architecture and political science, Jenny Rice and colleagues noted that it had not been fully theorized in rhetoric as a useful concept and instead often conflated for nostalgia, or the type of local gimmicks found in restaurants, hotels, or other tourist sites. For Rice, recouping the concept in rhetorical studies meant filling in the missing rhetoricity from the theory to disrupt "given narratives of belonging that are framed on a national level and between individuals."[24] By doing so, we gain understanding of alternative ways of belonging by highlighting "what people actually do in that region that marks them as part of that place."[25]

In particular, Rice articulated four premises of regional rhetoric as a way to see its potential as a rhetorical theory. They include imaging regions as something other than existing "between global and local."[26] Instead, region serves as a rhetorical interface for people to engage the material ways "flows" cut across land (such as food, labor, migration). Second, Rice argues that although regions may have important relationships with the national narratives, regional rhetoric may indeed conflict with national identity. As such, we must envision regions not as backdrop or spatially bound landscapes, but

rather as "folds" or "networks in flux." Finally, and critical to this study, regions should be seen as strategies. "Regionalism" is a strategic rhetorical performance marked in contrast to national or local performances. Such enactments allow for novel ways of "appearing in publics and as publics."[27]

Most recent work in rhetorical studies, including E. Cram's essay "Feeling Cartography" in 2016, echo the importance of space as a performative dimension, but with a different flavor. Cram highlights the significance of recognizing the "mechanisms at work in the containment of social bodies by foregrounding borders, positionality, and subjectivities in the formation of identity and agency."[28] As an example of this work, Cram along with Melanie Loehwing and John Lucaites, narrates a shift from focusing on the "speaking citizen" to the civic potential of visual forms of participation, including what they call "the democratic potential of civic spectatorship."[29] Using the "Occupy Walls Street" movement, Cram and colleagues consider the power of spectatorship as well as personal photography as avenues that facilitate civic action.

Together, these inquiries suggest the importance of thinking about place, space, and belonging in new ways. Further, they broaden what constitutes civic action to include the consciousness awareness of place, as well as the visual arguments made by people acting and inhabiting particular places. To be sure, few geographical places offer as distinct a culture than the Southern United States.

When the South emerged as a distinct region, both in terms of social and geographical identity, is a matter of perspective. In his book, *A Way Down South: A History of Southern Identity*, James C. Cobb traces out the historical differences that

have contributed to the significant divide felt between the South and the rest of "America," from colonial times through the twentieth century. In the early republic, the northern colonies boasted a more diverse, industrially based economy, where citizens had great access to education, social, and political opportunities. This was compared to the southern colonies that relied on plantation production driven by slave labor. As such, New Englanders often recognized the South as distinct in an effort to dissociate the region from the "American" identity. As Cobb points out "Simply put, where southerners . . . have staked their claim to a distinctive regional identity defined in contrast with the North, northerners have been more likely to character their own identity as simply 'American.'"[30] By the time the colonies came together to fight in the Revolutionary War and form a new government, the South's distinctions were exceedingly apparent.

However, Cobb argues that it was not until the common defeat and aftermath of the Civil War that truly "solidified" a southern identity among white citizens. Specifically, the "Lost Cause" myths functioned as "a postwar rhetorical apologia absolving the abrogated antebellum decorum that valued hierarchy, paternalism, and racialized nobility and liberty for Whites."[31] "The Lose Cause" ideology forged a southern identity coalesced by justified secession, a downplayed reliance on slavery, and the erection of memorials, monuments, and cultural reminders for whites to appreciate, instead of dwell on defeat.[32]

The South has certainly experienced various transformations since postbellum times, yet regional identity linked to the South's colonial and Civil War history persists.

Although the middle of the twentieth century brought vision for a new and improved South that aligned more carefully with broader "American" identity, Cobb argues that "More than fifty years and several more New Souths later, however, it requires no great exertion to find vestiges of the Old South still flourishing."[33] To that point, Diana Carlin points out that approaching the 1964 election the South was a region outside the "presidential circuit" for a more progressive democratic like Lyndon Johnson. Despite being the home of the "Dixie Democrats," President Johnson's passing of the Civil Rights Act made it near impossible for him or his Vice President Hubert Humphrey, to make meaningful connection in the turbulent region.[34]

Thus, exploration of Lady Bird's whistle stop tour as a regional performance necessitates the adoption of a perspective attuned to the material, social, and economic differences the southern United States has and continues to represent. In her book, *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South*, Tara McPherson supports this type of regional sensitivity, highlighting the importance of assuming a regional perspective to understand place.[35] Specifically, McPherson expresses the importance of a regional lens to see how different places articulate issues of gender, race, and class. The analysis that proceeds accordingly draws upon a framework that reflects McPherson's call, the recent literature in regional rhetoric, as well as the spatial scope of performance, to understand how Lady Bird Johnson was able to draw upon her regional ties and knowledge as a viable rhetorical strategy for her civic performance as first lady.

Performing Regional Citizenship: The Lady Bird Special

This analysis examines two major components of Lady Bird Johnson's Whistle Stop Tour, *The Lady Bird Special.* First, I explore the visual and performative dimensions of the trip. I argue that that Lady Bird creates a latitude of acceptance for her trip by syncing her exigence with her southern identity as a way to buttress her physical journey into the South. Second, I consider her stump speeches throughout the trip. In doing so, I illustrate how her intricate knowledge and understanding of the South as a region, functions to bolster support for her husband. Together, this contextually bound performance allows Lady Bird to physically "pass" through the geographical region despite tumultuous crowds and waning political support.

As Charles Morris notes, passing, a particular practice of concealment occurs "when the markers of one's difference—skin, behavior, dress—can be camouflaged" so that rhetors are able to refashion a secondary identity "convincing audiences of an "acceptable" persona."[36] Carol Mattingly expands this understanding of women's particular performance of "passing" observing how nineteenth century women often confounded their roles or concealed their identities by dressing a particular way. She argues "If identities were fashioned according to bodies/clothing and the places/spaces those bodies were permitted to inhabit, clothing used for transgressing social, economic, racial, and gendered demarcations communicated for the wearers in a manner that no other dress could."[37]

Performatively, Lady Bird make several strategic choices to fashion herself an "acceptable persona" to allow her to transgress the racial and social turmoil of the

southern United States. Specifically, she begins by proposing to physically enter the southern United States by way of train, an acknowledgement to the small towns that did not have access to an airport. Additionally, before and during her whistle stop tour she honors and displays various norms and customs that allow her to make headway in the region as a southern woman. As a result of this performance, President Johnson is able to join her at the final stop in New Orleans to address the region himself, a performance some critics have called his "finest hour."[38] Her strategies, taken together, represent the possibilities associated with regional dimensions of citizenship and performance.

Cultivating Regional Culture on the Lady Bird Special

Lady Bird frames her exigence for the Whistle Stop Tour by aligning her motivation for the trip with her southern roots. In her oral history she recalls "I knew the Civil Rights Act was right and I didn't mind saying so . . . but I also loved the South and didn't want it used as the whipping boy of the Democratic Party."[39] Likewise, President Johnson and his advisers understood that "the same southerners who thought LBJ was an SOB would allow their customary notion of chivalry to prevail in the presence of a lady—specifically Lady Bird, born and raised in Easy Texas and steeped in Old South tradition."[40]Although her precedent breaking trip is undoubtedly tied to her tenure as first lady and the public platform it affords, a deeper contextualization exemplifies how her regional ties to the South are largely responsible for her success in proposing and planning the solo campaign. Michael Gillette, the historian who published Lady Bird's oral history, writes, "Perhaps no chapter in Lady Bird Johnson's tenure as first lady underscored her southern identity as did the whistle-stop campaign trip."[41] In

considering the specific ways the first lady mobilized her southern identity to navigate regional barriers, Tara McPherson highlights the particular behaviors that have allowed southern women to participate in civic life in unprecedented ways.[42]

In particular, Lost Cause ideology prompted women to take an active role in securing the public memory of the South in organizations, monuments, and memorials. Such a cause allowed *white* women to enter the public sphere by taking part in the preservation of southern history and the memorialization of that memory in public shrines. To this end, Lady Bird Johnson clearly demonstrates her understanding of that opening when she recalls in her oral history her purpose in taking on the tour. She states: "I thought the South was getting a bad rap from the nation and indeed the world. It was painted as a bastion of ignorance and prejudice and all sorts of ugly things. It was my country, and although I knew I couldn't be all that persuasive to them, at least I could talk to them in a language they would understand."[43] After the Civil War, the migration of white southern women into the public sphere corresponded with public advocacy for the South's distinct way of life. Although Lady Bird's whistle stop tour is ostensibly on behalf of her support for the Civil Rights Act—legislation aimed equality, especially in the South—her position as a white women speaking in defense of the South underscores the historic relationship between white women and civic activism. Lady Bird saw her effort as a way to help fight the alienation of southern whites, advocating the Civil Rights Act as newly instated rights of *all*. As Gillette notes, "Her speeches beckoned southerners to look ahead to a time when racial antagonism would no longer stifle the region's progress."[44]

As David Murphy points out, even [Liz] "Carpenter noticed her southern heritage rise up in her as Lady Bird talked," emphasizing her southern draw when she made numerous calls to the "guv-nuh" of each Southern state she planned to visit.[45] Despite many southern politicians outlining the difficulties facing the Democratic Party in the region, Lady Bird kept her charm, told them about *The Lady Bird Special*, stating she did not want "the South overlooked in the campaign."[46] To that point, Lady Bird relied on northern reporters throughout her planning and whistle stop tour to help reshape the South's image.[47]

Newspaper reports prior to Lady Bird's departure set the scene for her performance by emphasizing her close ties to the region. For instance, *The Evening Star* reported, "Mrs. Johnson knows what the South expects of its women and has left the fire and brimstone to them, while saying firmly, and with inborn dignity what her husband stands for."[48] The concept of "southern femininity" pervades the national imaginary in a way unlike any other region. As a result, the discussion of Lady Bird's understanding of southern womanhood essential to her credibility.[49] McPherson notes, after the South's defeat in the Civil War the feminization of the region occurred on both a literal level, with the loss of a large portion of the male population, but also figuratively, as the southern woman became the symbol of the region, and remains central to southern culture.[50] This includes a regional concern women's fragility and need for protection.

To this point, Lady Bird's planning thoroughly addresses the need for women's presence in the absence of her husband, as well as the need for male travel companions. A news report echoed these concerns, noting: "Joining her in the planning and the

odyssey itself were a host of remarkably capable Southern women, including Lindy Boggs, Betty Talmadge, Carrie Davis, Virginia Russell, Bess Abell and the indomitable Liz Carpenter."[51] Similarly, the Democratic National Committee released a statement noting that the group of women helping with *The Lady Bird Special* would be housewives, and campaign volunteers—all selected due to their specific interest in the region. A press release noted that "A whistle-stop Hospitality Committee—composed of pretty ladies for Lyndon—will pass out campaign buttons, whistles, balloons, LBJ hats and many other colorful souvenirs to the welcoming crowds." These obviously gendered markers, however, signify not just appropriate performance as a *woman*, but as a woman who claims to call the South "home."

In her attempt to solidify connection to southern culture as a reason to embark on her journey, Lady Bird evoked a narrative of "home." McPherson writes: "In much of the discourse on and of the South, place (as a region) and home come together in the notion of "home-place," a phrase indicating the degree to which the meaning of the South often slides into the meaning of home."[52] Reporter William H. White exemplifies this understanding writing: "It is her way of saying that in the South you *can* go home again."[53] Indeed, reports of "regional love," which highlighted a "southern way of feeling" were used as justifications for Lady Bird's trip. This effort was aided by a thorough "southernization" of the scene.

As Tara McPherson points out, "Tradition and manners are repeatedly framed as the glue that binds the South together, distinguishing it from other regions."[54] Both were full effect on the *Lady Bird Special.* This "maintenance of an aura of tranquility" that

McPherson details as part of the performance of southern hospitality is further performed in selecting appropriate accompaniment for Lady Bird's trip. An article from the Archives from *The Evening Star* notes "On her railroad car Mrs. Johnson has three masters of ceremonies, who speak in the Southern idiom and have records of service in behalf of the area that are well known" which included Hale Boggs, Buford Ellington, and Luther Hodges."[55] Similarly, Lady Bird's social secretary, Bess Abell gathered southern women to serve as hostesses to get off the train at each stop to pass out campaign buttons and literature. A White House memo details the "Snacks to be served on board" the train, featuring "special LBJ Ranch and Southern dishes." The food was served at designated "snack times," and featured recipes for chili con queso, pickled okra, and guacamole.[56] Senator Hale Boggs, who was escorting Lady Bird, would talk about the food during his public appearances, following it up with message like: "Now about this race. You're not gonna turn your back on the first Southern born president in a hundred years?"[57]

Although these performances of southern hospitality are seemingly harmless and undeniably useful in Lady Bird's regional performance of citizenship, they are also tied to some troubling traditions associated with performances of southern womanhood. Writing in a volume on gender and the South, Ann Jones argues that "…the source of southern womanhood in the South's retention of the ancient code of honor, the system of "patriarchy and womanly subordination."[58] This system is guided by public reputation, is community business, and not reflective of personal choice. In this context, Lady Bird's continual referencing to her male chaperones on the trip and the importance of their role,

as well as propensity to mention the absence of her husband, is symbolic of her ability to adhere to the confining boundaries of southern womanhood. Jones's reference to patriarchal norms, guiding gender roles in the South, are further illustrated by the politicians, who, despite not liking Johnson, could visit *The Lady Bird Special* under the guise of "simple chivalry."[59] Even the segregationist Governor George Wallace of Alabama, a place where Lady Bird had family ties and relatives living, "saw fit to pay his respects to Lady Bird."[60] He sent the wife of the Lieutenant Governor to bring her roses. Perhaps the most telling example of the power of the chivalrous and patriarchal norms, was the response from the Goldwater camp when Lady Bird was heckled by his supporters. After the incident behavior aired on the evening news, his campaign officials told protesters to "denounce their tactics."[61] As Murphy notes, "the belief that it would be difficult to attack a southern woman in the South where women are respected, if not revered, proved correct. Southern chivalry was not dead and was evidenced as more male political leadership joined the train and praised Lady Bird and Lyndon."[62] Lady Bird's narrative of defending her "home," and cultivating a medium steeped in regional understanding set the stage the numerous public speeches she gave along the trip.

Performing Southern Womanhood

In considering how Lady Bird Johnson crafted speeches for her Whistle Stop Tour, a cursory glance at the personal tone, concrete examples, and use of role as wife and mother might suggest a reliance on the feminine style, a viable strategy for first ladies to use in the public sphere[63] However, in the context of her regional performance, a closer examination reveals additional layers of region-specific understandings of

femininity.[64] Tara McPherson defines femininity as "a set of ideas about appropriate womanly behavior and feelings that are generally based on cultural assumptions about female nature."[65] Although socially and discursively constructed, its performance garners material effects. Specifically, southern women have used their performance of femininity (i.e. playing the bell or the lady) as a way to enter the public sphere and as a way to "survive" doing so.[66] McPherson warns, however, that this act often "renders invisible other powerful social relations."[67] Indeed, the South's regional conceptualization of womanhood and the southern lady as a site of cultural meaning often functions to "smooth over a complex and contested history."[68] As a linguistic performance of passing, Lady Bird's rhetoric reflects a deep understanding of what it means to be a woman in the South. She does this by addressing her purpose for being there, infusing her speeches with regional-specific references that demonstrate her knowledge and connections are more than superficial, and mirrors in language the performative dimensions of her tour. As she states in Mobile, Alabama, "Although you might not like all I say, at least you understand the way I say it."[69]

As Carlin notes, despite a wealth of knowledge about Lyndon Johnson's plans for Civil Rights, the "Great Society," and overall economic progress in the South, Lady Bird avoided showing too much "expertise" in any specific area. She hedged her performance as a source of both anxiety and anticipation, as she stated: "Anxiety because I am not accustomed to whistle-stopping without my husband; anticipation because I feel that I am returning to familiar territory and heading into a region that I call home."[70] Her reliance on male chaperones throughout the trip also continued her

contextual performance of regional norms in chivalry and roles. For example, in Wilson, North Carolina she notes: "Your own Secretary Hodges and Mrs. Hodges, who are so kindly acting as my escort on this whole tour of the South…"[71] She also mentions female hostesses who are traveling with her, normalizing their roles. In Rock Hill South Carolina, she thanks Governor Russell "for welcoming me to South Carolina and thank you for lending your brilliant and gracious wife, Virginia, to us to help plan this trip."[72] Finally, Lady Bird makes a point to mention Lyndon's absence often stating: "I bring you greetings from my husband. He wanted to come himself, but the consuming and arduous tasks of the Presidency make a long day's work."[73]

In her departing speech in Alexandria she notes: "I'm fond of the old customs—of keeping with kinfolk, of long Sunday dinners after church, of a special brand of gentility and courtesy."[74] In Alexandria, she unabashedly states: "I wanted to make this trip because I am proud of the South, and I am proud that I am part of the South."[75] Similarly, in Valdosta, she expands: "I wanted to take this trip because I am proud of the South and I am proud that I am part of the South. I am fond of the old ways of keeping up with your kinfolks—all of your uncles and aunts and cousins, right down to the fifth cousins—of long Sunday dinners after church—of hayrides and visiting for weeks with pallets on the floor for all the young cousins."[76] This specific knowledge comes from Lady Bird's southern upbringing, from her time spent in the South, from her understanding of the region. Evidence of her familiarity continues throughout her speeches as she often uses it to bring up specific knowledge of southern history.

In Alexandria, Virginia she notes: "I am proud of the valor with which Southerners [sic] have served their country in every war in which we have been engaged. Even before we were a nation, Southerners [sic] were suppling learning and leadership to the task of building our great country."[77] Likewise, she often points out Great Southern men as a means of identifying with her audience, including Robert E. Lee, Emmerson, and Thomas Jefferson.[78]

Lady Bird adds concrete examples rooted in specific places, people and customs that serves as a basis of common knowledge between herself and her audience. In Fredericksburg, Virginia, for example, she says, "One of my favorite visiting places was elegant Kenmore, so laden with history, eating gingerbread as I strolled across the lawn."[79] Likewise, from "Johnson Park in Savannah," to summers in Alabama since the time of her girlhood, to Lyndon Johnson's great-grandfather who hailed from Oglethorpe County," she roots her familiarity in examples of place. Similarly, she identifies with specific people.[80] In Richmond notes that her "…husband had an ancestor, Leonard Barnette, from New Kent County."[81] In Savannah she talks about the personal relationships of prominent southerners in the region, such as the Talmadge's in Savannah; in Mobile it is the Senators Lister Hill and John Sparkman as her husband's "old and valued friends."[82] She locates her regional knowledge in specific places so to identify herself, and at times, her husband, with the regional South.

She shares her awareness of southern customs. In Chester, South Carolina she states "I have a lot of fond memories that I'm sure you share. I am fond of the old Southern customs . . . of summertime filled with watermelon cuttings and swimming in

the creek and visiting for weeks."[83] She speaks of "cattle and cotton" in Rock Hill, South Carolina, and school songs in Tallahassee, Florida.[84] She acknowledges the great legacies of the South in lighthearted ways. In Selma, North Carolina she adds, "After all, this is ham and egg country and we don't want anything to happen here to spoil our favorite national breakfast", in Georgia she talks about "Georgia broiler-chicken and Georgia peanut butter, drinking Coca Cola."[85] Similarly, she ties her more formal knowledge to personal memories of being in the South… "I used to spend—in all the years when my husband was in Congress—happy summer weekends driving over the country-side to come here."[86] These genuine experiences ground her presence in particular locations and memories of the South, fortifying herself against claims of ill will or deception.

Finally, she deflects her knowledge and approval of the president's politics—a move befitting her place as a woman. As stated in an internal White House memo, "education" was an ideal topic for the first lady to comment on, especially as a mother of two college-aged daughters.[87] Therefore, in Greensboro, Ahoskie, Durham, Tallahassee, the first lady supports her husband by asserting that that education is good for economic growth and progress. Offering her husband's support for educational initiatives and his hope to continue his plans for the "Great Society," strengthen her role as the supportive mother of two students, especially during her stops along the "research" triangle in North Carolina. To this point, in Ahoskie, North Carolina a humorous anecdote is used: "Some of my closest relatives are students and they tell me: "Mother, if you really want to make a hit, visit all the schools at class time."[88] She repeats a similar line in

Greensboro, North Carolina. Likewise, in Fredericksburg, she offers: "With two daughters in school and college, I can't help having a special warm spot for women's education. I have heard much about Mary Washington and its program…"[89] That her daughters, Lynda and Luci, were on board the Whistle Stop train, added to the visual argument that Lady Bird was well within the boundaries of womanhood in her role as spokesperson, their presence helping mitigate LBJs absence.

As Lady Bird moves through the geographical South, she continues to substantiate her claim of belonging as a citizen of the South, but she also used her ethos to realign her husband with the region. The repositioning of LBJ as a man of the South was not one based in politics, but rather in belonging. These connections are often made based in location. In Richmond, for example, she traces the ancestry of Lyndon noting "My husband had an ancestor, Lenard Barnett, from New Kent County."[90] She also draws directly on Lyndon's own feelings for the region. In her first stop in Alexandria she notes: "So these are the main reasons I wanted to make this trip. I want to tell you from Alexandria to New Orleans that to this President and his wife the South is a respected and valued and beloved part of the country."[91] In Petersburg she unequivocally states: "For all these reasons the President is proud of you and I came here to say to you that to this democratic president and his wife, the South is a respected, valued and beloved part of the country."[92] Variations of this line continue in Richmond, Rock Hill, Savannah, Thomasville, Biloxi, and at her final stop in New Orleans. In doing so, her regional performance and commitment to the South is inescapably linked to Lyndon Johnson. She ties her regional citizenship status to her husband, attempting to create

identification through consubstantiality. This effort was not in vain—as Lisa Burns notes, "Many [sic] were still willing to support Johnson as a native son, even though reluctant about the racial changes Johnson championed. As Lady Bird's tour ended in New Orleans, Johnson joined her and delivered a speech that many historians have argued epitomized his new relationship with his home region."[93]

The sheer amount of support Lady Bird received while attempting to campaign a region made largely volatile by the passing of the Civil Rights Act is noteworthy. The backing she established from Johnson's political supporters in the planning of the tour, as well as along the way is perhaps foreseeable—but despite crowds cheering "we want Barry," and hecklers in several of her stops, an unusual amount of Dixie Democrats, and even some Republicans, turned out to welcome *The Lady Bird Special*. "Claude Sitton, also of the *New York Times,* credited the "Lady Bird Special" with garnering several firm endorsements from Southern Democratic leaders, tapping "new sources of active support, financial and otherwise" and arousing "enthusiasm for the campaign that had been sorely missing."[94] Liz Carpenter recounts that in addition to speaking with the crowds that gathered in each town, Lady Bird also met behind the scenes with "governors, congressmen, and local politicians, convincing them to publicly support her husband."[95] A reporter for *The Evening Star* confirmed: "Mrs. Johnson is not only drawing big crowds, but also the great Democratic names in the South. And their physical presence by her side clearly identifies them—conservative, moderate and liberal—with the Democratic administration in Washington"[96]

Conclusion

This chapter explored Lady Bird Johnson's 1964 whistle stop tour, *The Lady Bird Special*. As the first solo campaign act on behalf of a first lady, Lady Bird set precedent when she planned, staffed, and executed her trip after the Democratic National Convention. Beyond looking at the cultural-contextual factors that allowed her to make such a shift in the first lady role, I have attempted to outline Lady Bird's use of her regional identity as a native born southern as a rhetorical resource, that subsequently allowed for her successful passing through the geographical South despite her husband's unpopular politics. In particular, I have suggested that the framing of her exigence, the context under which it emerged, as well as her rhetorical responses throughout the tour, reflect of a type of regional citizenship, one that was performed and guided by the regional rules of the South, instead of those reflective of national narrative or prescribed the first lady role. The first lady-as-regional-citizen offers potential for the role to be imagined as a distinct public servant, equipped with alternative sources of agency.

The material impact of Lady Bird's successful trip was widespread. On the ground, Lady Bird was able to foster an atmosphere conducive to the appearance of Lyndon Johnson at the final stop in New Orleans; as Burns notes "When her husband carried four of the eight states in the election, Johnson's whistle-stop tour received much of the credit."[97] From there Johnson was able to build on the identification Lady Bird created, and addressed civil rights issues head one. As Carlin observes "Without Lady Bird leading the way, Johnson would not have been in New Orleans to much such a pronouncement."[98] After her tour ended, columnist Max Freedman wrote "…perhaps

this marks the emergence of women as central figures in a national contest instead of being on the edges of a campaign."[99] Indeed, this whistle stop campaign played a significant factor in pushing the rhetorical boundaries for not only the first ladyship, but more generally for women's position in the public sphere at a time of great change. Further, Gillette claims that "less than six months later, the same formidable network of political wives assembled for the trip would be mobilize against o organize local Head Start programs throughout the South."[100] Lady Bird also drew on large numbers of women in her "phone-a-friend" campaign effort that attempted to register more women voters prior to the election. Historian Lewis Gould credits Lady Bird for bolstering Democratic interest in the Southern region and minimizing defectors from the party.[101]

Beyond general strategies of identification or speech adaptation, the value in assessing the material, economic, and cultural differences that cut across geographical regions as context for understanding rhetoric enriches how we approach historical and space-specific performances. Although regional studies should avoid the type of regional kitsch or worse, xenophobic identification, often associated with region-as-place, recognition of region as material and space bound constituents of performance allows for a deeper understanding of how and why citizens do/not engage with national narratives. Regional citizenship is not a fully modal/unattached practice removed from subjectivity, rather it showcases the possibility to move between identities.

By drawing on tenets of critical regionalism, regional rhetoric, as well as the expanding opportunities to consider the performance aspects of space, I have examined how the first lady can draw upon a multitude of resources in her public duty as citizen. I

have also illuminated how she can be simultaneously be called to act as a public citizen in new contexts. In doing so, I have discovered one opportunity for the first lady to, in some sense, divorce herself from her role's inherent ties to the nation-state and appeal to a particular segment of the population.

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The work of a Republican Mother was considered a civic duty under the assumption that "being a good citizen also meant being a good mother." By the late nineteenth century, the Republican Mother was synonymous with "ideal woman." Further, to be a good first lady meant "hailing, modeling, and promoting publicly the civic values" of good mothers.

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[63] Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "The discursive performance of femininity: Hating Hillary." *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 1, (1998): 1-19; Dubriwny, Tasha N. "First ladies and feminism: Laura Bush as advocate for women's and children's rights." *Women's Studies in Communication* 28, no. 1 (2005): 84-114; Shawn J. Parry-Giles and Diane M. Blair, "The rise of the rhetorical first Lady: Politics, gender ideology, and women's voice 1789-2002," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 5, (2002): 565-600.
[64] My analysis draws on 28 of Lady Bird's scripted stump speeches from the tour, archived at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library in Austin, Texas.
[65] McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie*, 2003, p. 23.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie*, 2003, p. 19.
[69] Lady Bird Johnson, (1964, October 9). Remarks by Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson: Mobile, Alabama. Liz Carpenter's Files (Box 11, Folder 1). Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum, Austin, Texas
[70] Lady Bird Johnson, (1964, October 6). Remarks by Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson: Alexandria, Virginia. Liz Carpenter's Files (Box 11, Folder 1). Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum, Austin, Texas.
[71] Lady Bird Johnson, (1964, October 6). Remarks by Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson: Wilson, North Carolina. Liz Carpenter's Files (Box 11, Folder 1). Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum, Austin, Texas.
[72] Lady Bird Johnson, (1964, October 7). Remarks by Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson: Rock Hill, South Carolina. Liz Carpenter's Files (Box 11, Folder 1). Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum, Austin, Texas.
[73] Lady Bird Johnson (1964, October 7). Remarks by Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson: Charlotte, North Carolina. Liz Carpenter's Files (Box 11, Folder 1). Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum, Austin, Texas.
[74] Murphy, *A Texas Bluebonnet,* 2006, p. 73.

[75] Johnson, "Alexandria," 1964.
[76] Lady Bird Johnson. (1964, October 8). Remarks by Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson: Valdosta, Georgia. Liz Carpenter's Files (Box 11, Folder 1). Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum, Austin, Texas.
[77] Johnson, "Alexandria," 1964.
[78] Johnson, "Alexandria," 1964; Lady Bird Johnson, (1964, October 6). Remarks by Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson: Fredericksburg, Virginia. Liz Carpenter's Files (Box 11, Folder 1). Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum, Austin, Texas; Lady Bird Johnson, (1964, October 6). Remarks by Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson: Ashland, North Carolina. Liz Carpenter's Files (Box 11, Folder 1). Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum, Austin, Texas.
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[81] Lady Bird Johnson, (1964, October 6). Remarks by Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson: Richmond, Virginia. Liz Carpenter's Files (Box 11, Folder 1). Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum, Austin, Texas.
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[83] Lady Bird Johnson, (1964, October 7). Remarks by Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson: Chester, South Carolina. Liz Carpenter's Files (Box 11, Folder 1). Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum, Austin, Texas.
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[89] Johnson, "Fredericksburg," 1964.
[90] Johnson, "Richmond," 1964.
[91] Johnson, "Alexandria," 1964.
[92] Lady Bird Johnson, (1964, October 6). Remarks by Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson: Petersburg, Virginia. Liz Carpenter's Files (Box 11, Folder 1). Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum, Austin, Texas.
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[94] Burns, "Lady Bird Johnson," 2012, p. 62.
[95] Burns, "Lady Bird Johnson," 2012, p. 67.
[96] "Mrs. Johnson Draws the Crowds," 1964.
[97] Burns, "Lady Bird Johnson," 2012, p. 62.
[98] Carlin, "Lady Bird Johnson," 2004, p. 84.
[99] "The Whistle Stop Tour", 2001, p. 1.
[100] Gillette, *Lady Bird Johnson,* 2001, p. 356.
[101] Murphy, *A Texas Bluebonnet,* 2006, p. 75.

4. THE CONTAINED CITIZEN: FIRST LADIES IN SPACES OF PUBLIC COMMEMORATION

Breaking up the wall-to-wall cases of sparkling White House China, surrounded by the faces of countless women, some iconic, others unfamiliar, an uneasy question is posed in the "The First Ladies exhibit at the Smithsonian: "Who is a First Lady?" Thus far, this dissertation has unpacked serval aspects of this question. As the original keepers of American hosting and social politicking first ladies are inextricably linked to public and political acts. With no formal charge they rely on precedent, but also, as this project has further determined, are called forth by the press and personal exigency to engage in civic acts. As a rhetorical figure the first lady has been posing her own challenges to exclusionary elements of civic life over the last three centuries.[1] As site of both conventional femininity, as well as feminist advancement the first lady must contend with assumptions of gender, race, and class. Indeed, from two person careers, to benevolent volunteers, to strategic components of presidential campaigns, there is much to contemplate about the first lady role—and nowhere better is the public asked to ponder such questions as in spaces of commemoration. This final chapter asks "how do we remember First Ladies?" and what does such a commemoration tell us about citizenship. Undoubtedly, all the women who have served in this historic role have contributed service and sacrifice to the nation, forging a unique relationship to the polity. In public spaces of commemoration, like the Smithsonian, the more important question becomes: how do we remember them?

As women's narratives are often missing or removed from the national landscape of commemoration, first ladies offer a rare and visible opportunity to honor American womanhood.[2] Notably, first ladies are featured in their own personal, albeit, small, exhibit in the Smithsonian's national American History Museum.[3] Additionally, individual first ladies from Eleanor Roosevelt to [soon-to-be] Michelle Obama are included alongside their husbands in Presidential museums and libraries scattered across the nation.[4] Their presence at these highly visible and visited sites, offers the potential to understand how visitors are asked to understand these women as models for citizenship, as public servants to the nation, and as representations of U.S. womanhood.

Thus, this case study is designed to explore how these carefully crafted "memories" construct a rhetorical iteration of the first lady-as-citizen. The scope of this essay includes six Presidential museums, including that of Lyndon Johnson, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush, as well as reflections on the Smithsonian's exhibit on the first lady in the American History Museum at the Smithsonian. I examine how the public is asked to understand the first lady's "embodiment of citizenship" through the visual arguments made in our public sites of commemoration, including her relationship to the President, the polity, and gender.

Broadly, this essay conceptualizes the first lady's citizen-status as contained, and disengaged from the polity. Though ostensibly portrayed as a maternal civic-republican, a remarkably active citizen-status, the first lady symbolically contained through the images, text, and spacial elements of these exhibits, which amount to a performance of

citizenship that is inaccessible to the public. Specifically, the juxtapositioning of the first lady against the president as "common citizen" confines the individual women and the role by circumstance, dissociating them from the public. Moreover, although performative shifts in the first lady role are framed as growth in rhetorical action, her work is ultimately contained as other-centered. We cannot position ourselves in her role, because her role is to serve us.

Commemorating Citizenship

Although distinct in their individual missions, presidential museums and the first ladies exhibit at the Smithsonian share in their commemorative purpose. Both exist as sites of public memory, directing their visitors to the shared nature of memory, the "recollections that are instantiated beyond the individual by and for the collective."[5] Appropriately, these remembrances are often found where they are most visible to publics, locating bodies in particular spaces within exhibits to view symbolic (re)collections of the past, such as national museums and exhibits.[6] Through these ritualized practices, the images on display, the arrangement of artifacts, and the textual descriptions, become identifiably pedagogical and rhetorical.[7] As Victoria Gallagher and Kenneth Zagacki remind us these spaces "communicate to the viewer, in the language of photography or painting or illustration or commemoration, the qualities, the pleasures or pain, the duties, the kind of past, present and/or future that is desired."[8] As such, they are ripe for study amongst scholars interested in the ways shared narratives educate the public, and mediate public understandings of our nation's "shared past."

Importantly, as Bernard Armada points out "Because of the limitations of symbol-use, museum exhibits can only cue us in to segments of history—they can never represent "the" past in all of its social, cultural, and political complexity."[9] Although Benjamin Hufbauer, a scholar of presidential museums, implores the importance of including more historians in the construction of sites like presidential museums to offer a more balanced and "accurate" display of history, he also recognizes that these spaces are inherently "ideologically charged."[10] To be sure, the stories we tell in our public commemorations are frequently motivated by political aims and generally authored by our institutions, leaving us with partial memories that oblige institutional interests rather than historical facts.[11]

Further, Ekaterina Haskins reminds us that rhetoricians are interested in how representations of past are used for today's purposes, and how, in particular, these memory artifacts participate in a construction of American citizenship.[12] Haskins writes, "Memory practices constitute a major cultural technology of citizenship: memorials, commemorations, and other rituals of retrospection mediate citizenship both by envisioning models of civic identity and by staging experiences through which people come to embrace or reject these models."[13] Thus, as "technologies" of citizenship, scholars seek to understand how narratives and images in sites of commemoration promote consensual notions of a collective identity/belonging. Barbara Biesecker powerfully echoes this point and captures the essence of these bodies of literature in considering reconstructions of WWII at the turn of the twentieth century. She states:

"By manufacturing and embracing a particular *kind* of American, a certain idea of what it means to be a "good citizen," these popular cultural texts, best understood as technologies of national cultural transformation, promote social cohesion by rhetorically inducing differently positioned audiences…to disregard rather than actively to seek to dismantle the inequitable power relations that continue to structure collective life in the United States."[14] Underlying these "technologies" of citizenship is the power to construct a collective subject position; a "we" from which to engage in a collective, national, narrative. In other words, sites of commemoration help define the individual citizens that make up the larger "we." This definition is not always inclusive.

Megan Fitzmaurice points to one such process she calls "commemorative privilege" found, in the Capitol building's National Statuary hall. There visitors are invited interact with statutes of those citizens who "emulate the nation's history of ascriptive citizenship ideals" on the main floor, while less likely to come across statues of citizens who challenged such norms, who are housed in the basement.[15] Additional examples of the exclusive nature of US citizenship can be found in other commemorative sites, such as the Plains Indian Museum where violent conquest is presented as passive and uninteresting as to distract visitors from interrogating narratives of white colonialism.[16] They can also been seen in remembrances individual people, including commemorations of Sojourner Truth that are left void of her critique and radical messages to instead serve current narratives of race and gender relations.[17] More recently, Kristen Hoerl's work on selective amnesia of news coverage of President Obama, further demonstrates how rhetorical structures "silence those who have

challenged systemic racial injustice in recent US history."[18] These particular instances showcase how more "favorable" understandings of citizenship become foregrounded.

Unsurprisingly, they favorable understandings are more often than not embodied in the "great man" version of national history. Though a plethora of 'great man' histories and heroes pervade our textbooks, our understanding of women and gender throughout U.S. history is scarce. Sometimes presented as brief vignettes, historians Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Kathryn Kish-Sklar underline a major issue—that women are remembered "for their ritual status" instead of their actual contributions.[19] Even when prominent women have been mentioned in the history books, "the radical substance of their work and their lives was routinely ignored."[20] Thus, in addition to being under represented, women's histories are often incomplete, or ideologically narrow as these histories often focus exclusively on private or domestic roles even when public alternatives exist.

As Roseanne Mandziuk argues, "[b]y their very nature as interpretative, symbolic acts, public commemorations are significant sites of struggle over the nature of the past and its meaning for the present."[21] This tension plays out across numerous sites of commemoration in the United States where women are featured or absent. Carol Mattingly draws our attention to the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) massive undertaking to build fountains and other commemorative sites to recognize women's accomplishments. Yet as Mattingly notes, this effort has largely been forgotten at the start of the twenty-first century as the prime public space selected has been sifted of its monuments by more powerful groups laying claim to visible space.[22] More

recently Megan Fitzmaurice comments on women's fight for a space on the National Mall for the National Women's History Museum, which currently exists exclusively online. She notes that the constant effort to attain physical space speaks to the privilege of physicality in commemoration.[23] Other scholars point to the often missing narratives. In her exploration of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Kristan Poirot argues that it is not that women are simply forgotten as actors in the civil rights movement, but rather a reliance on violence and masculinity in the museum's narrative produces a commemoration that "limits at the outset the conditions and possibilities for women's emergence."[24]

In considering Presidential museums as commemorative sites, it is impossible to ignore the overarching goal: "As sites of memory, presidential libraries have embedded within them an ideology that attempts to reify reverence for the presidency."[25] Within their walls, the museums converge the personal journey of a President with a larger narrative of US history. In doing so, these spaces indicate to the public what it means to be a good and virtuous citizen. A similar objective exists at the National American History Museum, where the first ladies exhibit, a once traveling component of the permanent "American Presidency: A Glorious Burden," serves to compliment the American ideal/culture type of the First Family. Yet despite their auxiliary role, at both at presidential museums and the first ladies exhibit, the public recognition of the first ladies and their work offers opportunity to see highly visible women, acting in the service of the nation at different points throughout history. When we consider what opportunities the role's commemoration affords, as an institutionally authored vision of

citizenship, we must first be attuned to the reality that she is never there by her own accord.

Remembering a Presidency

Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's framework for the presidency as a "two-person career" is reflected in our commemoration of the first lady role. Drawing on the work of sociologist Hanna Papanek, Campbell asked us to consider the presidency as a profession that places demands on a married couple, calling for dual cooperation if the career is to succeed. In particular, Campbell notes that first ladies are exclusively responsible for maintaining the White House, taking on projects and or causes, and representing the nation in public affairs and matters of hosting. Shawn Parry-Giles and Diane Blair support this conceptualization noting that many first ladies have taken on the "first mother" role, exuding "female concern" for the health and morality of the nation, while the president presides over matters of government, war, and public affairs. In Parry-Giles and Blair's discussion of the rise of the rhetorical first lady, they note that although her use of rhetoric "holds a symbiotic relationship with the rhetorical presidency" it maintains its own unique path.[26] Thus, the first lady is a distinct and necessary component of the presidency.

However, not all first ladies take on entirely domestic duties. As Tasha Dubriwny notes, the first lady's role in the two person career "varies widely" based on what the public deems acceptable. She adds that "the wife's functions depend not only on "her

talents" but on the cultural atmosphere of the time and the political priorities of her husband and his party."[27] Thus, because the division of labor in such a career is not necessarily based solely on the traditional public/private divide, first ladies are left to play a role that Campbell notes, is "an ambiguous mixture of public and private functions whose performance almost inevitably offends someone."[28] These performances are intensified as the women who perform them become idealized prescriptions for what it means to be an "American woman."[29]

An analysis of six presidential museums and the Smithsonian's exhibit "The First Ladies" reveals that commemorative efforts do not simply recapture the first lady's role in the two-person career (e.g. maintaining the White House, hosting, advocacy, etc.). Instead, I argue the first lady provides a deliberate contrast in agency and accessibility to the presidency. Where the president is the "common citizen," exuding a narrative that invites visitors to identify with his personal journey to an exceptional role, the first lady is positioned as the "contained citizen." Her circumstance places her in the role. Her agency is not her own, but rather a product of the role. There is also dissociation between her work and the average citizen, seen most clearly through the framing of her actions as separate from that of the average woman, including our reliance on her "exceptional domesticity." As such, the commemorations of her role overwhelm the possibility for identification with citizen-visitors.

The "Common Citizen"

Unsurprisingly, presidential museums are framed and contextualized around the president. Individualized narratives about presidents, including biographical accounts of

his upbringing, relationships with faith, family, and friends, and rise to the presidency, are designed to characterize him as the "common citizen." The "common citizen" frame appeals to visitors, as it sets the stage for the president's achievements grounded in an affirmation that the leader of the free world is not an out of touch figure to admire or contest from afar. Rather, he is and arguably has been, a common man, a model of character, which regular Americans can strive to mimic. [30] Necessarily, and in accordance with the "American" way, his citizenship is *active*, a feature that represented throughout each presidential museum where visitors are hailed by plaques of text, photographs, and artifacts to see themselves as part of president's journey. Narratives of self-reliance, perseverance, and individualism invite visitors to embark on his journey towards a better American life. To understand him, we must see him as a person, who through his own actions, has come to take on this extraordinary role. The underlying assumption, is that the nation's president is just like you and I; his "citizen-status" although different, is accessible and attainable.

The common citizenship of the president is most clearly established in the opening narrative of each museum. Specifically, through his "humble beginnings," relationships with family, and with faith, the president makes active choices to overcome hardship, get involved in military or public service, and to eventually run for office. Jimmy Carter's museum offers a vivid example of the common citizen, who, through his own volition was able to go from the "*Plains to Politics."* His childhood storyline, "The Man from the Plains," outlines Carter's life in the Georgia plains without electricity and running water until his teenage years. Yet, the family farm proved to be the "fertile

ground for a bright, energetic boy." Indeed, the timeline, featuring family photos of a young Jimmy living on the farm, playing on the basketball team, and entering the Navy showcases how Carter's "energy," and "ambition and restlessness" led him from the plains to the "bigger world" that called to him. Memorable phrasings on wall sized panels help visitors understand how "The farm boy becomes a Naval Officer, a Business Man, and the Governor of Georgia." The overarching explanation is that Carter's life is a natural outgrowth of his own choices.

This action-centered narrative of a common man pursuing a better life is echoed in other presidential museums. Gerald Ford is characterized as "The Man from Grand Rapids," who was unfamiliar to most Americans the year prior to his presidency. Although the Bush family had a legacy of public service, it was a personal "Political Itch" that propelled George HW Bush first towards the senate, then the presidency. Similarly, framed by photographs of young children and family against the vast Texas sky, George W. Bush, talks of his West Texas upbringing where he learned his "optimism, independence and responsibility to others" that led him first to love, then to faith, and eventually to public service. Another Texas native, Lyndon B. Johnson, is described as being driven by his "aspirations" and "love of politics" from Texas Hill country to the White House. His "Path to the Presidency" section in the Johnson museum is filled with active verbiage, including a sign that notes how he "Climbed from a position as Congressional Aide, to a seat in the House of Representatives, to Senate Majority Leader." The physicality of this journey is reflected in stacked building blocks that bear the names of the positions and the years Johnson held them for, assenting

towards his position as vice president. The Clinton library reflects a more modern and less personal take on the presidency. Nevertheless the opening section about Bill Clinton's life includes artifacts and photos from childhood, helping visitors understand that despite losing his biological father before he was born, Clinton found a "nurturing home in Hope, Arkansas" and eventually fell in love with "the world of learning" that illuminated all of his possibilities. In all these cases, the president, a common citizen, is motivated by intrinsic energy, and propelled by their own actions.

The presidents' is made consubstantial with the polis commitments to work, family, and faith. These commitments are recirculated topois in American mythology, articulating the protestant Christian and heteronormative ideals of the "American dream." For example, for several of the presidents, hardship encountered along their path is mitigated by the helping hand of family, and a firm faith in God. In the opening panels of text and photographs of George W. Bush's museum, there are several mentions of his strength coming from family and faith. His relationship with his father, a former president, is specifically credited to "faith, family, and resolve." It was also through faith and family that George W. Bush had the strength to quit drinking at the age of 40, and continue achieving greatness through public service. The language and photos used in these early collages reflect similar commitments. A photo of George holding his twin daughters as infants is captioned "[The babies] were, simply put, the answer to all our prayers." A cluster of text describes defining moments in Bush's life that changed him, including renewing his faith, getting married, having children. Finally, this devotion to such common aspirations eventually leads to his decision to run for office, and later to

influence policy. The "no child left behind act" as portrayed in his museum, emphasizes his care for children as a moral duty.

Faith and family are used to accentuate additional moral commitments of presidents and average citizens. Gerald Ford's museum, casts him as a wholesome family man from Grand Rapids and the perfect antidote to the Nixon era crises. The plaque that announces his rise to the presidency is titled "Dad, the White House is Calling," stressing the ordinariness of his life prior to becoming vice president. The context of Ford's narrative becomes one of hard work and honesty in the hope of ushering in brighter times for the nation and its families. A common commitment to religion is also evident at the Carter museum, where a plaque describes Jimmy Carter's reliance on religion not only to make decisions as the president, but for shaping his role as a citizen. George HW Bush has an actual a panel in his museum titled "Faith, Family, and Friends." Juxtaposed to the nearby section on "Public Service," visitors come to know the Bush family through private photos and the family values that inspired George HW Bush to take the steps to seek a life in government. In one large block quote amongst photographs of childhood, he recalls "My father and mother believed in an old-fashioned way of bringing up a family—generous measures of both love and discipline." The narratives created by the textual references and photos work to interpelate visitors – defining the polis in terms of these tropes of American mythology. In turn, the use of the President as the embodiment of this mythology, the museums enable a consubstantial relationship—a shared commonalty—among identify visitor-citizens and presidents.

The Contained Citizen

With the president framed as the "common citizen," it seems promising that the first lady would provide a similar companion—the common, albeit gendered, female counterpart. After all, the visible nature of her public service mirrors that of a civic-republican perspective on citizenship, while the role's domestic underpinnings point towards lasting ties to maternal citizenship.[31] This active, yet gendered take on civic responsibility would offer some opportunity for identification with average citizens, especially women, who see their contributions to public life as unofficial, yet anticipated. Despite some visual and textual support for the first lady as the "maternal civic-republican" in spaces of commemoration, I argue this is *not* the overarching frame through which visitors make sense of the first lady's civic embodiment. Instead, I contend the first lady is positioned as the "contained citizen," her formal duties and public engagement limited by an amplification of circumstance and dissociation.

Contained by Circumstance

In her husband's presidential museum, a quote from Lady Bird Johnson speaks to the origin of the circumstantial nature of the first lady role: "The first lady is an unpaid public servant elected by one person—her husband." It is true, many women who have taken on the position do so by virtue of their marriage.[32] However, by highlighting the circumstantial nature of the first ladyship these spaces diminish our perception of the first lady (and the individual women who fill the role) as an accessible agent of change. Visuals, text, and the materiality of the spaces provides a continual reminder to visitors that the first lady is afforded particular opportunities and challenges as a direct result of

her husband's presidency. This circumstantial framing, I suggest, leads to an inaccessibility of her civic status; visitors are not asked to see the first lady as a relatable citizen, because the source of her agency is not her own. We are not asked to think about her activism or service as a model to guide ours if her efforts are only by virtue of a position.

In particular, narratives of circumstance are used to bridge the gap between a woman's life prior to and then during the first ladyship. Instead of the slow progression visitors see the president make throughout his life, the presidential museums focus less on a first lady's development and more on her first lady initiatives. As such visitors often see early beginnings of a first lady's life (e.g. where she came from, when she met and married her husband) directly followed by what she did while first lady. It is how Rosalynn Carter can be described as "A shy girl from the Plains married a handsome sailor, raised a family, and saw the world" at one end of the Carter museum hallway, and a politician, reformer, and the leader of the president's new commission on mental health at the opposite end. It is how Betty Ford, an individual supporter of ERA and women's rights is photographed next to Gerald Ford signing an Executive Order in 1975 for the "International Year of the Woman." The details of how a first lady went from a supporter to an activist, or from housewife to policy influencer are often missing, signifying to visitors that her power and influence stem from her position, not her individual efforts. Hillary Clinton was unavoidably active prior to her tenure as first lady, a leading voice for women in children in Arkansas. Although there is some mention of her undertakings as the first lady of Arkansas, they are primarily located in

Clinton's early biography on the second floor instead of woven into a distinct section on her public and political activism as first lady on the first floor. Although visitors may gain some sense that Clinton's work as first lady was a natural outgrowth of her personal interests, the museum's narrative suggests that it was *after* her husband's election that she was able to continue championing these issues, taking an unprecedented 78 trips to foreign countries, and shaping the administration's foreign policy and assistance programs for women and children.

When the first lady is presented in more maternal roles, such as the mother of the nation, or keeper of the White House (roles that some women might be inclined to associate with) visitors are redirected to think about the unlikely circumstances that brought the first lady there to begin with and the material differences between them. For example, Laura Bush's video "White House as Home" attempts to help visitors understand what it is like living in the famous home. Laura Bush describes the home as an American landmark filled with staff, redecoration and restoration efforts, and butlers. She notes "It's such a privilege to live here and be the steward for all this—the fabulous things that are in this house: the beautiful art, the historical furniture, the beautiful building itself." Although "home" may at first seem like a commonality, it soon becomes a factor of difference. Despite the presence of family photos and presidential pets, ordinary visitors typically do not live amongst grand art and a wait staff. The uniqueness, the elevated sense of importance, denies that similarity.

Similarly, Barbara Bush advocated for causes that were associated with maternal citizenship. She was a fierce advocate for literacy in the nation's children, publishing

books of her own about the importance of reading. The Barbara Bush Parent Center was established in near Bush's museum in College Station, TX to meet the real needs of parents hoping to learn English and promote reading for children. At the Bush museum Barbara is quoted noting: "Each day we should do something to help others." Yet instead of connecting this to her work with literacy or children, we instead see her "helping others" through a count of how many receptions, dinners, lunches, and other events Barbara Bush hosted during her first 100 days in the White House. What could have been an opportunity to create identification with visitors through a mutual interest in helping others instead becomes about the official role of first lady and hosting duties.

A quote from Rosalynn Carter within the Carter museum summarizes the inherent inaccessibility that results from the circumstantial nature of the first lady role: "First Ladies throughout our history have been expected to be adoring wives and perfect mothers, to manage the public and social aspects of the White House to the satisfaction of all critics, and to participate in 'appropriate public service.' The role of the First Lady is a difficult—and sometimes nearly impossible—one to fill, and each one of us has dealt with this challenge in her own way." Indeed, what becomes apparent in the Carter museum (and in the others) is that first ladies are *not* able to overcome the demands of the role. By virtue of their position, they cannot make their work more accessible or relatable to the public. Rather, as Carter points out, all she and others can/have done is *cope*. While this message may resonate with women trying to manage their many expectations/roles in society, I would argue it also suggests that the first lady position requires or imbues its occupants with the superhuman strength and grace required to

grapple with such demands. Instead of initiating a dialogue about the impossible roles we ask women to take on, including in the first ladyship, we are instead directed to distance ourselves from the role.

The materiality of the museums also brings into relief the circumstantial containment of the first lady role. Large glass display cases isolate the first lady's achievements, small plaques announcing the significance of the artifacts. Although these displays fulfill a curatorial function in the museum, the items selected for display often amplify the glamour and uncommonness of the role.[33] For example, heavy glass cases in the Johnson museum fill up the majority of a floor dedicated mostly to Lady Bird. The cases spotlight a beautiful gown worn during her world travels, the outfit she wore on the day JFK was assassinated, as well as doctoral honors from The University of Texas, and "keys to the city" from various trips. Nearby, more glass cases filled with gold jewelry and exotic gifts from foreign visitors are flanked by a sign that reminds visitors that the first couple "represents America." Although these artifacts are relics of her time in office, the absence of more common place photographs or objects, directs our attention to the desirable aspects and material gains of travel, and hosting, excluding any trace of the physical, mental, or emotional labor these activities demand.

Similarly, the Smithsonian's exhibit on the First Ladies exemplifies the impact of materiality on the role's containment, as the focus of the museum are artifacts associated with the foundations of the first lady's femininity and domesticity. As the collection for the Smithsonian's exhibit began in the early twentieth century with beautiful one-of-a-kind gowns worn at Inaugural balls, it is difficult to imagine the space without their

overwhelming presence. Large cases on the walls are filled with antique White House china. The thick glass cases, low lighting, and signage denoting official ceremonies and traditions, communicate the formality of this space and the women who are featured here. Though some signs point out lesser known facts about a first lady's hosting style or include personal preference in her China pattern, the materiality of the space, that is dresses and china, overwhelm the possibility for identification, even as a maternal citizen.

The argument that the first lady is contained by her circumstance through the materiality of the museums is not to suggest that spaces of commemoration should not use artifacts and relics to educate, express, and show off the various aspects of the first lady role. Rather, I am suggesting that when the materiality of the museums further bolsters the overwhelming nature of the role. Visitors are not invited to engage with the first lady's specific legacies because they are first directed to contemplate whether her gown was "too frumpy" or "the wrong shade." They are not asked to identify with the gendered double binds common to women who wish to advocate for public causes, because they are first invited to comment on her table setting for a state dinner. The materiality guides our sense of what is of importance in these spaces, and what we should pay attention to. The items behind glass, or dimly lit gallery lights, stand in sharp contrast to the well-lit and diversified collection of artifacts representing the president.

Contained by Dissociation

Whether she is bound to a clear narrative of the role or portrayed in more individualized settings, the first lady's civic embodiment is always dissociated from the

average citizen. Specifically, the first lady's citizen identity is rendered inaccessible, or in two distinct, yet interrelated, ways. First, when commemorate efforts focus on a singular, narrative associated with the first lady role—one of gendered labor, domesticity, and femininity—visitors are positioned as citizen critics, unable to identify with the role's "exceptional domesticity." In essence, they are not invited to identify with the first lady, because her role is to serve them. Conversely, when the role is commemorated on a more individual basis, inconsistency in the role's performance created by unique and novelty labels, make it difficult to identify commonality between the role and the women who fill it. As such, visitors are not positioned to identify with a cohesive yet multi-faceted performance of citizenship, but rather asked to understand each iteration as fragmented and unique.

In the Smithsonian's exhibit visitors are presented with a generally cohesive narrative of the first lady role. Inside the exhibit, the Smithsonian divides the first lady role into four major segments: the "Fashionable First Lady," including details about the public's admiration and sometimes obsession with her clothing, "The National Hostess," represented in physical space by a large display of White House China, the "Inaugural Gown Tradition" with a display of gowns, and finally "Changing Times, Changing First Ladies," the smallest section intended to showcase the more political aspects of the role and select women who have captured our attention for their unique activities. Aside from the "Changing Times" section, which is smallest and hidden from the main portion of the exhibit, the overarching narrative of the first lady role is one of tradition; she is the

national hostess, concerned with femininity and domestic duty, always poised in relation to her husband.

In this commemorative setting, a narrative of "exceptional domesticity" positions the first lady as a servant of the people. However, unlike the president's public service, made common or similar to the average citizen through his personal commitments to family and faith, the first lady's service separates her from the polity. This is because visitors are asked both openly and subtly to critique her "work" not emulate it, to consume her role, not aspire to it. Walking through the entrance to the *Ehliu and Susan Rose Gallery*, the actual name of the Smithsonian's exhibit on the first ladies, visitors are easily convinced that it is indeed a gallery: they peer into dimly lit room, displaying beautiful works of art under spotlights, with limited interaction necessary to "engage" the contents. Inside, the first lady's fashion and China are on display and up for critique. In the "the Fashionable First Lady" where gowns and everyday clothing are on display, a sign clarifies that it is the first lady's goal is to meet the public's expectations in terms of her dress and presentation. This of course changes with the times and society's expectations. If visitors follow the posted plaques, which explain that the public often "look[s] to their fashion choices for clues to their characters and personalities and maybe even the administration's politics," they come to expect that the First Lady's choices in fashion are to fulfill our expectations—whatever they may be. Quiet conversations in the exhibit focus on the "beauty" of a particular gown, or the "awful" pattern found on someone's China. Visitors are dissociated from the role because they are asked to look upon it from afar, to pass judgement. Average citizens, then, are positioned as critics,

consuming the first lady's culture and artifacts, but rarely asked to interrogate beyond the narrative put forth by the materiality of the museum.

Conversely, when the role is removed from its more traditional underpinnings, it becomes inconsistent and contradictory. Influenced by the actions of individual women instead of mannequins or representative sets of China, it becomes difficult to identify common characteristics. Specifically, the first lady is commemorated in the presidential museums; the role takes on the personality of the individual women who hold it. Although aspects of the "maternal civic-republican" are evident, and there is some support for the traditional and gendered underpinnings, these narratives are far more specific to the individual enactments of the particular first lady. In particular, the museums use labels such as "ground breaking," "unprecedented," and "controversial" to mark the achievements and activities of the first lady. Thus, the public never gains a sense of what the role's civic responsibilities are—only particular enactments.

For instance, Betty Ford spoke out about the women's rights, supported the ERA, partially admitted to trying marijuana, and went public with her breast cancer battle. Although Ford was lauded for her candid approach to the role, we find these actions labeled as "controversial." Similarly, Rosalynn Carter is defined as an "independent partner"— "unlike any other first lady before or since," who "regularly attended cabinet meetings to stay current on the nation's business" and remained a close adviser to her husband. Brining a full agenda of her own to the position is described as never before or since seen (despite this being mostly true for Eleanor Roosevelt, and after, Hillary Clinton). Her partnership with her husband is framed as a onetime occurrence,

containing this type of relationship and making it permissible for the public to question and deny such a relationship could exist when the Clinton's entered office two decades later. Hillary Clinton herself is narrated in the Clinton museums as an extraordinary person, capable is great achievements. Her unprecedented career prior to taking on the role, her position as the Clinton administration's healthcare policy expert, as well as her election as a senator in New York all speak (briefly) to Clinton's personal narrative, but offer less cohesion to what it means to enact a unified embodiment of citizenship. Clearly, there is great potential in identifying with a single strand of Clinton's or any first lady's individual narrative. However, as such, visitors never feel connected to the civic status of the *first lady* role.

Opportunities for Change

Despite the containment of the first lady's citizen status throughout much of our commemorative spaces, there are opportunities to see these women as active and independent agents of change. Such opportunities are found when the first lady is separated from her husband and the demands of the two-person career. When we see the first lady in a more isolated position within presidential museums we often find reprieve from the domestic narratives and a focus on their individual legacy. Although Hillary Clinton's individual space in the Clinton museum is small in space—just one cove of 12 on the first floor, we see her framed as an individual person instead of part of her husband's administration. There is a brief description of her unprecedented run for the senate, a collection of her awards for service, and description about one of her books. Betty Ford also has some space on a wall dedicated to her which features her among her

more radical and independent words, such as "Being ladylike does not require silence," along with information about her public support of women's rights, as well as her demand that republican members on the senate vote on the ERA. Likewise, Barbara Bush is best recognized and "doing her own thing" when she is displayed in candid family photos that span several walls at the museum—at sleepovers, Christmases, and events away from Washington.[34] Although we can still see the domestic/gendered roots of these activities, they are also far more individual and ground breaking when removed from their partnership frame, as well as situated as continuations of their own training/education/goals, instead of those of the position they hold.

The Smithsonian's "Changing Times, Changing First Ladies," also promotes an active first lady, also far removed from the presidency. This segment can be found tucked away in the smallest, darkest, hall at the back of the exhibit—tellingly, furthest from the nearby American Presidency exhibit. The small hallway includes four large display cases that carefully deals with those women who exemplified outstanding activism and individualism. A large white sign describes the feature: "Dolley Madison, Mary Lincoln, Edith Roosevelt, and Lady Bird Johnson are four of the first ladies who fashioned their own ways of handling the White House, families, parities, and politics . . . they crafted significant roles for themselves that they believed would best allow them to serve the president and the country." Granted we are never fully removed from the president (lest the position would not exist) the women featured in this section are featured as political, signs giving context into the political norms of the time, as well as an exemplar act of each woman's service. For example, Lady Bird Johnson is fully

recognized for her solo campaign, Dolley Madison for her heroic efforts in saving precious items from the burning White House during the revolution, Edith Roosevelt's expansion of professional support for the white house, and perhaps most interesting, Mary Lincoln, for her role as her husband's political advisers and disregard for political norms, and criticism endured. It is in these brief moments that we find examples of what a more relatable commemoration of this role *could* look like.

Conclusion

Exploring how the first lady is being remembered in spaces of public commemoration, this chapter examined the visual and textual arguments across six Presidential museums, as well as the Smithsonian's exhibit on First Ladies. As a national representation of American womanhood, and visible on the US landscape of commemoration the first lady role poses and unique opportunity to understand how women may be asked to understand themselves as citizens. In considering public memory's role in constructing citizenship ideals, I sought to understand how the first lady is constructed through the visual and textual presence in this sites of commemoration, and how the public is asked to relate to her embodiment of citizenship.

Throughout each of the Presidential museums and the Smithsonian's exhibit, a narrative of citizenship is crafted rhetorically through a variety of visual and textual performances and juxtapositions. In presidential museums, the first lady is presented with qualities reflecting a maternal civic-republican: she is obligated to be engaged with the public and in politics, but her work is carefully maternal and reflects a commitment to domesticity. However, her role, a position of circumstance, must be read within the

context of the Presidency, as a two-person career. Because the President is portrayed as an active, common, citizen, the first lady's embodiment of citizenship becomes contained. Through its passive origins, and dissociation from the individual woman and the public, her citizen-status is disengaged from the polity. Visitors are not asked to embody her role, her duties, or her civic engagement. Instead, the role of first lady, its resources and power, overwhelm the possibility for identification. Individual women and their public commitments become contained within the role.

Upon undertaking this project, I constantly theorized about these public spaces serving as a "conduit" of sorts—a channel by which the public could interact with and understand the first lady-as-citizen, a method for visitors to assume her civic duties, to learn from them (whether good or bad). Yet after investigating, it seems as though there is not a conduit at all. These spaces that feature a commemoration of the first lady function more like a lens than a conduit. Visitors are not transported or asked to embody her persona, rather they can view from afar. The public is not hailed to become maternal civic-republicans, but rather continue to expect the service from the role. The first lady's work, her domestic service to the nation, continues to be reified as other-oriented, and unlikely to change, despite progressive first ladies, despite "changing times."

As the first lady role reflects an antiquated society, and is rife with outdated gendered norms, perhaps it is best that visitors are not asked to embody her role. After all, it is promising that average citizens are instead hailed to identify with the Commander in Chief, possibly envisioning themselves as capable agents of change and greatness in their own life. Yet, from various visits to presidential museums and the first

ladies exhibit, it is more likely that the millions of American who visit these sites leave viewing the work of First Ladies, old a new, as frivolous, unimportant, or unnecessary, instead of recognizing it as the unpaid, thankless public service role that it is. It is likely that visitors, especially those who identify as women, are reinforced with the belief that women's role in public service is indeed, secondary, and should be remembered as such.

The issue, is that the *public* role of first lady offers an avenue to understand how women have been asked to participate in political and public life since the earliest days of the republic. It is a role, regardless of circumstance, that is thrust upon women who have served with grace, and many whom have contributed to meaningful change within the national fabric, as well the lives of women and children. It is a role that deserves proper historical contextualization. Because while it may be indeed, a product of circumstance, it remains to this day a position capable of inducing great change, through whatever means available. Thus, we must not only relish in those small spaces where the role shines brightest, or on its own, but also continue to demand more thorough and discussed narratives of women's contributions to civic life, instead of simply settling for visibility.

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[1] Shawn J., Parry-Giles, and Diane M. Blair, "The rise of the rhetorical first lady: Politics, gender ideology, and women's voice, 1789-2002." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 5, no. 4 (2002): 565-567.

[2] See for example Michael Kammen, *Mystic chords of memory: The transformation of tradition in American culture*. Vintage, 2011; Carol Mattingly, "Woman's Temple, Women's Fountains: The Erasure of Public Memory." *American Studies* 49, no. 3 (2008): 133-156; Kristan Poirot, "Gendered geographies of memory: Place, violence, and exigency at the Birmingham civil rights institute." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 18, no. 4 (2015): 621-647.

[3] See Benjamin Hufbauer, *Presidential temples: How memorials and libraries shape public memory*. Univ Pr of Kansas, 2005; Edith Mayo, *The Smithsonian Book of the First Ladies: Their Lives, Times, and Issues*. Macmillan, 1996. The First Ladies exhibit is hosted by the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C.

The Smithsonian Institute, founded in 1846, is the largest museum and research complex in the world. In the early twentieth century, the Smithsonian began collecting for its first exhibit to prominently feature women, which has since become the First Ladies exhibition in the American History Museum. What started as a simple goal of obtaining dresses to represent each woman has since grown into a collection of over 1,000 artifacts, documents, and objects remembering the lives of American First Ladies. In total, the museum has undergone at least three notable "generations," bringing about different displays and features.[3] The shift in the early 1990s to incorporate political and social aspects of the role is perhaps most notable, and has supposedly allowed the museum and it's patrons to explore the more complex and interpretative narratives of each woman in politics and American culture.

[4] See Hufbauer, "*Presidential temples," 2005;* Kanter, *Presidential Libraries as Performance: Curating American Character from Herbert Hoover to George W. Bush*. SIU Press, 2016.
Presidential museums and libraries are a relatively new phenomenon. The library portion denotes the space used to house presidential documents and archives. Most libraries are built to situate a museum around or within them, designed to provide a narrative of the president's life and time in office. This museum space is what most of the public comes into contact with on their visit. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the first to build, and one of the few to utilize his library, constructed after he donated his personal and Presidential papers to the government. Roosevelt envisioned presidential libraries providing access to important presidential records to the public. However, it was not until 1955 that Congress passed the Presidential Libraries Act, forming the uncommon relationship between the President's private foundation and the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), who assumes control of the library after dedication ceremonies. Typically, the president and his spouse raise funds and oversee the construction and curating of the museum and library, handing it over to government hired archivists and curators after its grand opening. Currently, there are 13 presidential libraries and museums in operation, with former President Obama's permanent library and museum currently being constructed in Chicago, Illinois.

[5] Linda Steiner, and Barbie Zelizer. "Competing memories: Reading the past against the grain: The shape of memory studies." (1995), p. 214.

[6] Greg, Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott, eds. *Places of public memory: The rhetoric of museums and memorials*. University of Alabama Press, 2010; Greg, Dickinson, Brian L. Ott, and Eric Aoki. "Spaces of Remembering and Forgetting: The Reverent Eye/I at the Plains Indian Museum, *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3, no. 1 (2006): 27-47Association." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3, no. 1 (2006): 27-47.

[7] Victoria Gallagher, and Kenneth S. Zagacki. "Visibility and rhetoric: The power of visual images in Norman Rockwell's depictions of civil rights." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 91, no. 2 (2005): 175-200; Stephen H. Browne, "Remembering Crispus Attucks: Race, rhetoric, and the politics of commemoration." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 85, no. 2 (1999): 169-187.

[8] Gallagher and Zagacki, "Visibility and rhetoric," 2005, p. 195.

[9] Bernard J. Armada, "Memorial agon: An interpretive tour of the national civil rights museum." *Southern Journal of Communication*63, no. 3 (1998): 235-243.Armada, Bernard J. "Memorial agon: An interpretive tour of the national civil rights museum." *Southern Journal of Communication* 63, no. 3 (1998): p. 236.

[10] Hufbauer, "Presidential Temples," 2006, p. 131.

[11] See for example Brown, "Remembering Crispus Attucks," 1999; Peter Ehrenhaus, "Silence and symbolic expression." *Communications Monographs* 55, no. 1 (1988): 41-57.

[12] Ekaterina V. Haskins, *Popular Memories: Commemoration, Participatory Culture, and Democratic Citizenship*. Univ of South Carolina Press, 2015.

[13] Haskins, "Popular memories," 2015, p. 9

[14] Barbara A Biesecker,. "Remembering World War II: The rhetoric and politics of national commemoration at the turn of the 21st century." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88, no. 4 (2002): 394.

[15] Megan Irene Fitzmaurice, "Commemorative Privilege in National Statuary Hall: Spatial Constructions of Racial Citizenship." *Southern Communication Journal* 81, no. 4 (2016): 252.

[16] Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki, "Spaces of Remembering and Forgetting," 2006.
[17] Roseann M. Mandziuk, "Commemorating Sojourner Truth: Negotiating the politics of race and gender in the spaces of public memory." *Western Journal of Communication (includes Communication Reports)* 67, no. 3 (2003): 271-291.
[18] Kristen Hoerl, "Selective amnesia and racial transcendence in news coverage of President Obama's inauguration." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98, no. 2 (2012): 180.
[19] Linda K., Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Kathryn Kish Sklar, eds. *US history as women's history: New feminist essays*. Univ of North Carolina Press, 1995, p. 1.
[20] Kerber, Kessler-Harris, and Kish-Sklar, "US history as women's history," 1995, p. 1-2.
[21] Mandziuk, "Commemorating Sojourner Truth," 2003, p. 273.
[22] Mattingly, "Woman's Temple, Women's Fountains," 2008.
[23] Fitzmaurice, "Commemorative Privilege in National Statuary Hall," 2016.
[24] Poirot, "Gendered geographies of memory," 2015, p. 624.
[25] Hufbauer, "Presidential temples," 2005, p. 175-176
[26] Shawn J. Parry-Giles, and Diane M. Blair. "The rise of the rhetorical first lady: Politics, gender ideology, and women's voice, 1789-2002." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 5, no. 4 (2002): p. 566.
[27] Tasha N. Dubriwny, "First ladies and feminism: Laura Bush as advocate for women's and children's rights." *Women's Studies in Communication* 28, no. 1 (2005): p. 87.
[28] Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, The rhetorical presidency. In Medhust (Ed.), *Beyond the rhetorical presidency,* College Station: Texas A&M University Press: (1996), p. 181.
[29] See for example Dubriwny, "First Ladies and Feminism," 2005; Campbell, "The rhetorical presidency," 1996.
[30] Kanter, "*Presidential Libraries as Performance,"* 2016.
[31] The First Lady is positioned as an *involved,* yet passive part of the Presidential museums. Though she is clearly engaged in service, no matter her past, her commitments are revised to reflect a maternal and domestic lens. For some First Ladies, these engagements truly are a natural outgrowth of her personal interests. But upon assuming the role, all are subsumed by the passivity of becoming the President's counterpart. Laura Bush's domestic work is noted to be a natural outgrowth of herself: as a former librarian she is featured "Shining a Light" on literacy. She is also portrayed as supporting her husband's "No Child Left Behind" act and launching her own "Ready to Read" supplementary program to improve early childhood education. As such, her personal interests in literacy and reading are easily framed to bolster her husband's active policy changes while in office.
[32] Betty Boyd Caroli, *First Ladies: From Martha Washington to Michelle Obama*. Oxford University Press, 2010.
[33] See Jennifer Keohane, "The Most Important Dress in the Country": The Rhetoric of Glamour in the Smithsonian's "The First Ladies." *Women's Studies in Communication* 40, no. 3 (2017): 270-288.
[34] Likewise, Laura Bush is featured in a small section of the Bush museum for her work a global ambassador for her literacy campaign, speaking out against human rights violations in Burma. And Lady Bird Johnson's work creating a Wildflower Center, headed the first solo campaign by a first lady, and played a leading role in the planning and execution of the Johnson museum and library is situated separately (on its own floor and away from other First Lady artifacts).

5. CONCLUSION

This dissertation sought to theorize the first lady as a distinct embodiment of gender and citizenship. With no official charge or constitutional guidelines the first lady is often thought of and hypothesized as the president's wife. Yet, the first lady role demands a public presence. Since Martha Washington left retirement in Mt. Vernon to serve by her husband's side in New York, women have been informally asked and expected to attend to their nation in a variety of official and unofficial ways. Wives, but also nieces, daughters, and daughters-in-law have served as the national hostess of the United States, a duty within the realm of "first lady," hosting citizens foreign and domestic. These women have organized, directed, and attended social and political gatherings, influencing government policy and politic al alliances. They have served as their husband's private secretaries, championed the goals of his administration, and traveled the globe on behalf of the American people and their own platforms. All who chose to fulfill the role of first lady have performed these duties in a public context, and despite the absence of official guidelines, the role persists. By starting such inquiry with the assumption that the first lady is indeed a public citizen, and by adopting a rhetorical perspective of how citizenship is understood and enacted, this project highlights the qualities, characteristics, and performative elements of the first lady as a citizen, as well as describes the rhetorical mechanisms that serve as both substance and means for the role's continuation.

Through three case studies I have traced how the first lady role is foregrounded as a public citizen. Specifically, I examined the projection of the role onto Michelle Obama during the 2008 press coverage of the presidential election, the rhetorical exigencies that compelled Lady Bird Johnson's 1964 Whistle Stop tour, as well commemoration of the role at the Smithsonian exhibit and six presidential museums. Though not inclusive of all opportunities, or contexts, each study illuminated a particular instance that explains *how* the role is preserved, expanded, and envisaged through public acts. Although this dissertation started with hopeful aspirations of uncovering the conditions of possibility of the first lady role to project a gender-progressive model of public citizenship, the case studies offered quite a different story. Indeed, despite the abundance of possibility in theorizing about the public nature of the first lady role, what manifested throughout this project, was a model of citizenship highly constrained, and overdetermined by not only gender, but also race and class. The first lady's citizen-status is not a common or accessible model, but rather always circumstantial and subservient to traditions based in white, heteronormative, male, supremacy. Indeed, the role's agency lies in its ability to reify the gendered, raced, and classed assumptions of our nation's liberal roots, not challenge them.

Each case study selected for this dissertation represented what I considered to be a *hopeful* scenario of how the first lady is called to act or represent a public servant, but my findings were mixed. As a *Symbolic Citizen* constructed by the press, the first lady role is reconstituted through the identification of and participation in the ceremonial duties of the first ladyship, masked as civic obligations. Lady Bird Johnson's

performance of *Regional Citizenship* showcased the larger possibilities of locating individual performances in geographical space, and the opportunities afforded in contexts subtly distinct from the nation-state. Finally, in spaces of commemoration the first lady is contained as a citizen, her activities and legacy curated in museums and exhibits is dissociated from the public. Together, these case studies represent both the limits and opportunities of foregrounding the first lady as a fundamentally public role. Although each study provided insight as to how the first lady offers a unique embodiment of gender and citizenship, the cases also serve as testimony to the hegemony of larger structures that prevent this citizenship from becoming accessible and in many cases, inspiring, to the average citizen. In what follows, I highlight the intersections between the three studies, discuss their implications, as well as offer direction for future research.

The Intersections of First Lady Citizenship

To appreciate the complex history and unpaid/unelected public work of the first lady, this project began by tracing the ways first ladies enact the role as public citizens. The case studies in this project aimed to understand how the first lady manifests as a particular embodiment of gender and citizen within several contexts. By selecting temporally oriented studies, I illuminated how civic acts are preserved, in sites of commemoration, called forth, in times of rhetorical exigence, and projected onto future first ladies during election season. What emerged from these studies was a highly contextualized account of both constraints and possibilities for the "lady citizen." In particular, I argue that despite the opportunity to recognize the first lady role as one of

public service and citizenship, the "model" of citizenship that arises is one overdetermined by gender, race, and class.

Examining the mainstream press coverage of Michelle Obama in 2008 provides an understanding of how the role is projected and preserved through the identification and performance of particular civic acts. More precisely, ceremonial duties, such as interest in fashion, or Inaugural traditions, become reified as civic action required of first lady potentials. This case study brought into relief not only the mechanisms by which the role persists through public acts, but also how said mechanisms are rife with assumptions of race, class, and gender. Indeed, the potential to have an African American family in the White House was a hopeful prospect for many across the nation, especially minorities looking for representation at the highest level. Michelle Obama, in particular, seemed like the ideal role model for women of color, as a successful businesswoman, mother, and candid first lady potential.

But her time in the spotlight leading up to the election revealed that to gain ultimate favor with the press and general public, Michelle needed to embody the tenets of white womanhood the first ladyship is founded upon. Additional, discourse among some journalists, and [white] feminists in particular, emphasized newly imposed double binds on the African American first lady: by confirming to the standards of whiteness and taking up more "traditional" roles (such as "mom-in-chief") Michelle now posed a threat to the "feminist" advancement of the first lady role. Thus despite being linked to the candidate representing "hope and change," Michelle Obama's journey to the first

ladyship highlights the insurmountable barriers posed by not only gender, but particularly race and class.

In considering a moment of advancement of the role, Lady Bird Johnson's 1964 whistle stop tour through the South seemed like the perfect exemplar. This was the first solo campaign effort of this magnitude taken on by a first lady and the possibilities to envision the role as a public advocate appeared obvious. While Lady Bird's ostensible goal—to campaign for the Johnson administration—is within the confines of traditional first lady duties, it is her regional performance that offered potential. Specifically, the context and rhetoric surrounding her whistle stop tour suggests fluidity between her identity as an American citizen and a regional citizen of the United States South. Her activities expanded our understanding of the contextual importance of citizenship and regional belonging. As an undeniable symbol of the nation state—the wife of the Head of State—her performance speaks to the power and potential in attending to regional, or simply finer, differences in civic character. The linguistic nature of her passing, as demonstrated in her southern knowledge, and particular performance of gender, reveal the specific rhetorical and visual strategies that not only garnered Johnson votes, but allowed the first lady to enact a close and contextualized relationship with the public.

However, in addition to the opportunity this study provided, it is important to note how Lady Bird's performance speaks clearly to the privilege afforded to the first lady based on her class and race. Her performance in the South was not *only* regional, but a regional performance of upper class, white, womanhood. Likewise, it is only from this position of privilege that Lady Bird is able to garner respect and command an

audience of politicians and citizens, alike. Her role as first lady offers her the opportunity to speak, but her race and class make it possible in the first place. It is in these reflections that nuances our understanding of the "first lady as citizen." Although gender may be hyper visible on the surface, assumptions race and class are often fundamental layers of the role's civic action.

It is typical to understand or view the first lady role as one based in gendered norms. This became abundantly clear when I first visited the Smithsonian's exhibit on the first lady in the fall of 2013 was somehow both dazzled and disturbed that the small space dedicated to such a unique role was filled mostly with gowns and China. Yet, I held out particular hope that individual commemorations of the role in presidential museums, and parts of the Smithsonian would nuance our understanding of her place as female-civic actor; that through our remembrance of her role, the public would grapple with some of these questions of gender, and maybe even race and class. Instead, I found the first lady's embodiment of gender and citizenship most disheartening at these sites of remembrance.

In particular, when the first lady is poised most clearly in relation to the nation-state, including to the president and the "unofficial" power and resources provided by her role, her actions become far more formalized and far less relatable. The clear containment of her civic duties occurs in the orchestrated commemorations of the presidential museums and at the Smithsonian's exhibit. Juxtaposed as the counterpart to the president's "common citizenship," the first lady is confined within the circumstances of her role. Her access to staff, funding, and global connections as the wife of the

president afford her opportunities unimaginable to the average citizen. Yet, as a *Contained Citizen*, her acts are literally confined behind glass and gallery walls, but also symbolically confined by the barriers of her circumstance and exceptional domesticity. The public is not hailed to identify with her everyday civic acts, nor her role. Instead, they are taught her role is to serve the public through extraordinary means. The first lady role offers so many opportunities to celebrate, including the individual specific endeavors of each individual woman; yet the resulting "model" of citizenship, including how the first lady is available and accessible to interact with the average citizen, is so highly constrained.

Implications of the "Lady Citizen"

As David Cisneros clarifies, "At its most basic level, citizenship describes membership in a community." However, how to best conceptualize, define, and study citizenship continues to be contested.[1] Although rhetorical approaches to citizenship tend to focus on the "what," in terms of what counts, and "what is" citizenship, conversations of "what" often necessitate recognition of *where* citizenship is occurring, implying borders, claim to belonging within those borders, as well as issues of exclusion. Scholarship in citizenship studies continues to recognize the need to broaden the terms by which it defines citizenship and indeed has moved towards more critical outlooks on the topic.[2]

Yet, as scholars of rhetoric and beyond continue critical work, often pointing out the futility of the nation-state model for citizenship, simultaneously physical borders tighten, applications for [U.S.] citizenship increase, and recent "travel bans" pose threats

to individuals seeking refuge, asylum, and citizenship in this nation.[3] In these cases, an argument can be made for continuing our understanding of how traditional models of citizenship exist, persist, and offer the possibility for expansion. It is at this point that I believed the first lady offered potential. Although her role is inextricably tied to a relationship with the nation-state, by virtue of a position linked to the head of state, challenges to normative and official "participation" in citizenship seemed viable. For example, it is not the inaugural gown tradition, ostensibly one of the most prominent displays of her role as "model woman," that invites visitors to contemplate how they seem themselves inspired by the first lady role; nor is it the priceless artifacts gifted to the first lady throughout her travels that create common bonds. And it certainly is not the red, white, and blue train, filled hundreds of members of the press, chaperons, and female hostesses that provide an accessible template for how to become involved. Instead, any useful model that emanates from the first lady's citizen status must be found in the individual ways that each woman who has held the role has wielded it to foster engagement with particular citizens.

There is potential in Michelle Obama's visual challenge as an African American woman, to the traditional tenets of the role as civic actor, as well as the discussion that grew throughout her time in the White House about standards of beauty, family, and what it means to be "American." Understanding how the first lady functions as Symbolic Citizen also recognizes that the "civic acts" identified in the 2008 election are only symbolic iterations of the first lady's "citizenship." That is, they do not represent the full range of civic engagement/citizenship enactment available to the first lady. Thus,

opportunity exists in the latitude between the first lady's prescribed civic symbolic duties and the individual exigencies that arise. In particular, the occasion to rearticulate the role through the performance of new and diverse civic acts, that both support the role's public presence, while also challenging the assumptions of what it means to be a "lady." Regrettably, I believe this change will be slow and requires the role be filled by increasingly diverse women. The press' constant struggle to "manage" Michelle Obama's difference throughout their coverage suggests the deeply ingrained, and persisting assumptions of race/class that influence societal understandings of what it means to be a "lady," does not yield to a single challenger (hence Michelle Obama's transformation). To witness tangible and consistent change in the coverage/articulation of new civic acts, I contend that the occupant of the role would have to continually pose challenges to these assumptions and perhaps even with more mainstream support from the press/society.

Despite the pomp and circumstance of Lady Bird's whistle stop tour, a regional lens demonstrated how the first lady can engage in civic acts at a level other than "national" or even "global." Throughout her whistle stop tour, Lady Bird demonstrates how a first lady can indeed evoke civic participation with those "on the ground," and form a unique connection with a specified segment of the polity. It is Lady Bird calling out hecklers during a speech, recounting her "journey of the heart," and her ability to form and mend ties with local politicians that showcases an alternative relationship the first lady can form with the people. This study identified how her relationship to the polity can be more personal, more specific, and grounded in their individual experiences.

Yet, I also want to conclude with caution. Lady Bird's performance, though inspiring, still speaks to the binds of the first lady role. Although she fostered a sense of belonging and participation among southern citizens, she was not able to do that "as first lady," but rather as a regional citizen. Her performance certainly offers intervention within the first lady role, but does not pose a challenge to the larger limitations the role presents.

Further removed from their personal, specific, experiences is our current portrayal of first ladies at the Smithsonian's exhibit, as well as in presidential museums. As I have argued, commemorative sites that feature the first lady do so not only to "remember her work," but to use her role serve the presidency. As such, her civic engagement and relationship to the polity is translated in a way that enhances the presidency, instead of grounds her as an individual. However, these spaces are changeable, and there are exemplars of what a "best practice" looks like in terms of commemorating our first ladies in spaces that are not fully their own. For example, the Carter Library has been updated several times since its opening in 1986. The most obvious examples found in the final sections that feature the ongoing work of both Carters in conjunction with the Carter Center. Photographs of Rosalynn Carter working with her husband in the U.S. and around the world on real, ongoing, humanitarian projects, of their own design somehow capture her as a relatable model. Perhaps it is her visibly aging face working as hard as ever to better the public good through real programs and initiatives, or maybe it is that we see more of her trajectory outside the formal role of first lady. Regardless, the subtle changes and additions to the museum showcase the opportunity to commemorate our first ladies as active individuals, not

static characters on finite trajectories. Unfortunately, these practices are far and few between.

The larger gender issue we face in commemoration—specifically, that women are portrayed as static, auxiliary, and overly domestic, in our commemorative narratives—limits our sense of their importance and presence as citizens. As I traveled near and far to visit presidential museums and to the Smithsonian, I was constantly in a state of dissonance about what I saw, read, and felt. I was elated to be so close to the artifacts, stories, and memories of such prominent, powerful, and dutiful women, but annoyed that they were confined to small physical spaces and articulated as feminine first, citizen second; I was excited, for example, that Eleanor Roosevelt's clothing on display was contextualized within her commitment to American made goods and protecting the rights of laborers, yet angered that she did not appear in the section that featured politically active first ladies; I was similarly in awe of what the Clintons—all of them—have accomplished and contributed towards the civic good, but downright astonished by Hillary's overall absence within the space.

The "Lady Citizen" has, at the very least, provided an alternative method for understanding and recognizing women's ever present, but often concealed, contributions to the nation. A fundamental drive behind my research about the first lady originates from continued unearthing and recognition of important work women have done for the nation. Though I am wary of the 'add women and stir' mentality, as well as the challenges posed by a social construction of what it means to be "a woman," I also know everyday citizens—and women—live in that socially constructed world and must

navigate a gendered legacy. Women's (largely defined) place in society has been and continues to be flawed, inequitable, and undervalued. But despite constraints, barriers, double binds, and stigma, they have and continue to shape the political and civic life of this nation.

Although I cannot change the overdetermined legacy of the first lady role, I can continue this work. I firmly believe it is essential to revive, resuscitate, and redefine how women's narratives are being remembered, created, and appreciated. This includes first ladies who were particularly active, abdicated the public service in favor of a private life, and those who stepped in during such times. The *Lady Citizen* has presented new obstacles to reviving the first lady's public legacy, but I hope it has paved the way further work to be done.

Directions for Future Research

This dissertation provides a new opening for several new and continued avenues of study. In particular, scholars should continue to investigate how women and other marginalized peoples continue to cross physical and symbolic borders, rhetorically, through their use of language, performance, and by locating their bodies in particular spaces. Scholars attuned to the visual and physical turn of rhetorical studies have ample possibilities to deepen our understanding of what it means to be "a citizen acting in public." Alyssa Samek's brand new article in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* theorizing the rhetoricity of mobility International Women's Year torch relay, is directly to this point. [4] Samek argues that as feminist runners moved South through place/space, they were creating a "discursive performance of citizenship."[5] She asks scholars to consider

how mobility can "constitute certain subjectivities" for citizens involved in social movements.[6]

Likewise, scholars should continue to interrogate how we define "public," as part of this inquiry. Although the studies in this dissertation coalesce around more traditional understandings of what it means for a first lady to act in "public" and as a "citizen," these terms remain up for debate and open to ongoing contextualization.[7] In particular, as a result of the often overdetermined and confined projection of the first lady's citizen status as found in obvious acts of public performance and visibility, this study suggests the importance of digging into lesser known, or smaller scale initiatives, speeches, and activism, to continue visualizing how the first lady enacts a meaningful relationship to the polity. Further, as issues of immigration and physical borders continue to be of immense significance, what it means to be part of the official polity as an "American citizen" will continue to be challenged. Finding commonality in smaller performances may offer opportunity to unite individuals struggling with citizen status.

Understanding the history and particulars of the first lady's public performances can also nuance current understandings of the role. Presently, the U.S. is witnessing an absent first lady as depicted by Melania Trump. Though the media may balk at her performance of the role, her silence and inactivity it is not unprecedented. However, whether or not her lack of engagement will shape future expectations, not only if she sees a second term, but also for future first ladies, should remain of interest to first lady scholars. If, for example, there is a shift in the symbolic qualities the press articulates in the next election cycle based on Melania's performance, the possibility for changing the

role's projection would seem manageable. Likewise, additional research should attend to the implications of Melania's disengagement with the polity, but also her outwardly distant position from the power and official-ness the role provides. Aside from relational implications, perhaps there is potential in her disengagement from the nation-state?

Finally, women, who have always struggled for full inclusion—especially women of color—should of course remain a central focus of civic/rhetorical studies. Though scholars may disagree about the utility of the concept "citizenship," or the futility in appealing to such a concept, commonality can be found in the ongoing inclusion and or/new theorizes that incorporates, accounts for, and prioritizes old, new, and different iterations of womanhood.[8] As a scholar I am fully committed to the ongoing discovery and revitalization of women's contributions to civic life. Recouping such engagement, official, unofficial, small, and large, weaves a more complete (though always partial) understanding of this nation's history. It also complicates existing narratives that serve hegemonic and oppressive forces.

This dissertation sought to revive an aspect of the role of first lady that is often missing from contemporary and historical narratives—their ongoing commitment to public service and civic life. By privileging their public relationship with the polity, and by examining the rhetorical nature of their civic engagement, this dissertation offers a new lens through which performances of the first ladyship can be understood. It also provides insight about the specific mechanisms and rhetorical structures that reify this role in the absence of formal guidelines—and salary

I have always been invested in understanding how the first lady offers a unique, often problematic, but also optimistic, starting point to understand women's historic and contemporary role in civic life. It *almost* goes without saying that I had hoped, intended, even, to conclude this project with my eye on the future path of the "first gentleman," or "first spouse." Yet, perhaps my ongoing work with the first lady has just increased in value, as many of us continue to contemplate "what happened" in the 2016 presidential election, and what must change before we can once again see another stride towards full equality in the highest office in our nation. Until then, lady citizens unite.

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[1] J. David Cisneros, "Rhetorics of Citizenship: Pitfalls and Possibilities." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 100, no. 3 (2014): 376.

[2] See for example: Karma R. Chávez, "Beyond inclusion: Rethinking rhetoric's historical narrative." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 101, no. 1 (2015): 162-172; Hector Amaya, *Citizenship excess: Latino/as, media, and the nation*. NYU Press, 2013; Belinda A. Stillion Southard, *Militant citizenship: rhetorical strategies of the National Woman's Party, 1913-1920*. Vol. 21. Texas A&M University Press, 2011.

[3] For example Gardiner Harris, "State Department Tightens Rules for Visas to U.S.," *The New York Times*, Sep. 18, 2017; Carrie Johnson, "Trump Rescinds DACA, Calls on Congress to Replace it," *Nation Public Radio*, Sep. 6, 2017.

[4] Alyssa A. Samek, "Mobility, citizenship, and "American women on the move" in the 1977 International Women's Year torch relay." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (2017): 1-23.

[5] Samek, "Mobility, citizenship, and "American women on the move," 2017, p. 1.

[6] Samek, "Mobility, citizenship, and "American women on the move," 2017, p. 23.

[7] For example, studies in this dissertation conceptualize what it means to be a "citizen" through a rhetorical perspective, but still within the boundaries of the nation-state as the first lady is inextricably linked. Also takes into account the separate spheres (public/private divide) inherent in the liberal founding of the U.S. government.

[8] See for example Chávez, "Beyond inclusion," 2015; Sonja K., Foss, and Cindy L. Griffin. "A feminist perspective on rhetorical theory: Toward a clarification of boundaries." *Western Journal of Communication (includes Communication Reports)* 56, no. 4 (1992): 330-349; Isaac West, *Transforming citizenships: Transgender articulations of the law*. NYU Press, 2013.

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